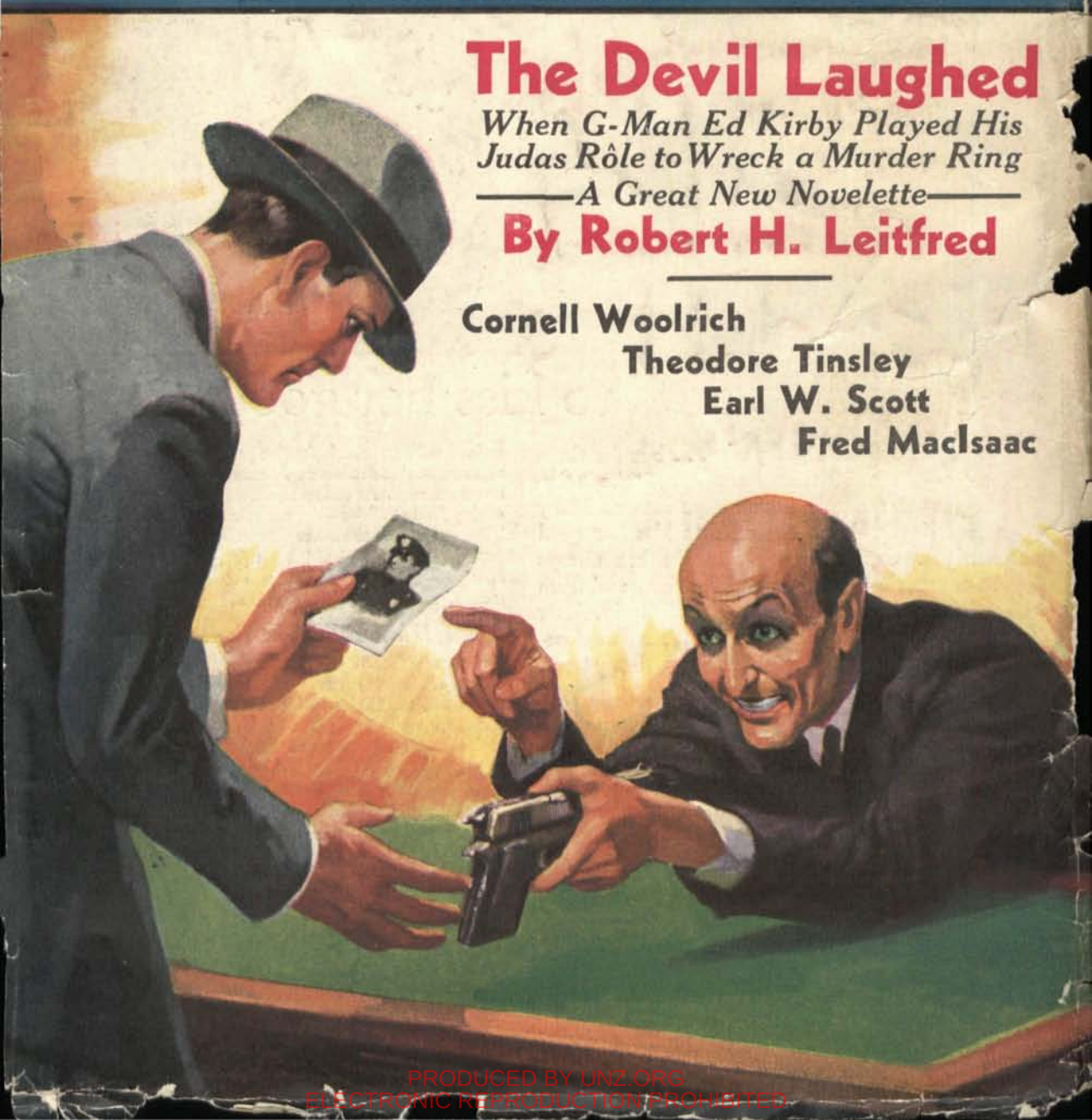
OCT. 10
10¢

Exciting Mysteries

DETECTIVE

FICTION WEEKLY

FORMERLY FLYNN'S



The Devil Laughed

When G-Man Ed Kirby Played His Judas Rôle to Wreck a Murder Ring

——A Great New Novelette——

By Robert H. Leitfred

Cornell Woolrich

Theodore Tinsley

Earl W. Scott

Fred MacIsaac

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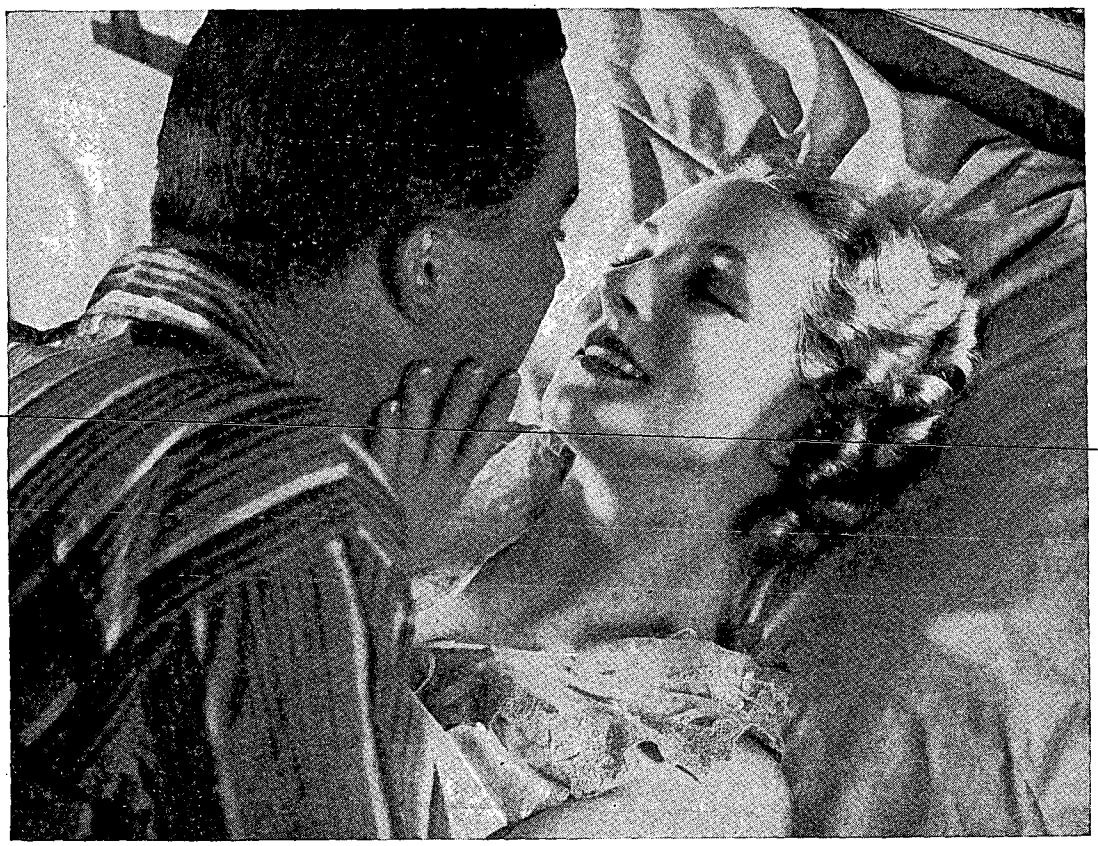

He still wants to kiss her good night

MARRIED eight years . . . but for them none of that humdrum, take-it-for-granted attitude that creeps into so many marriages. He still wants to kiss her good night. Clever woman . . . she has always known the secret of keeping dainty and fresh in all things . . . the breath particularly. After all, there's nothing like halitosis (unpleasant breath) to raise a barrier between people.

You Never Know

Your breath may be agreeable today and offensive tomorrow. The food you eat, the things you drink, the hours you keep—all bring subtle changes that may result in halitosis (bad breath). Consequently, you must ever be on guard lest you offend.

Better Safe Than Sorry

Fortunately, halitosis often yields quickly to Listerine used as a mouth rinse or gargle. Almost at once, this remarkable deodorant cleanses, sweetens, and freshens the mouth. At the same time, it halts fermentation of tiny food particles—the major cause of mouth odors. Then overcomes the odors themselves.

And remember, Listerine is safe even when used full strength—does not harm delicate tissues of the gums or mouth. *It actually stimulates them.*

When You Want To Be Sure

Fortunately for the public, many of the "bargain" imitations of Listerine are now out of business. Too strong, too harsh, too bitter to be tolerated, or lacking Listerine's speedy deodorant and antiseptic properties, such mouth washes were soon rejected by the public.

When you want a wholly delightful mouth wash, when you want to be sure of effective breath control with *safety* use Listerine and Listerine *only*. Rinse the mouth with it morning and night and between times before business and social engagements. *Lambert Pharmacal Co., St. Louis, Mo.*

For HALITOSIS *use* LISTERINE

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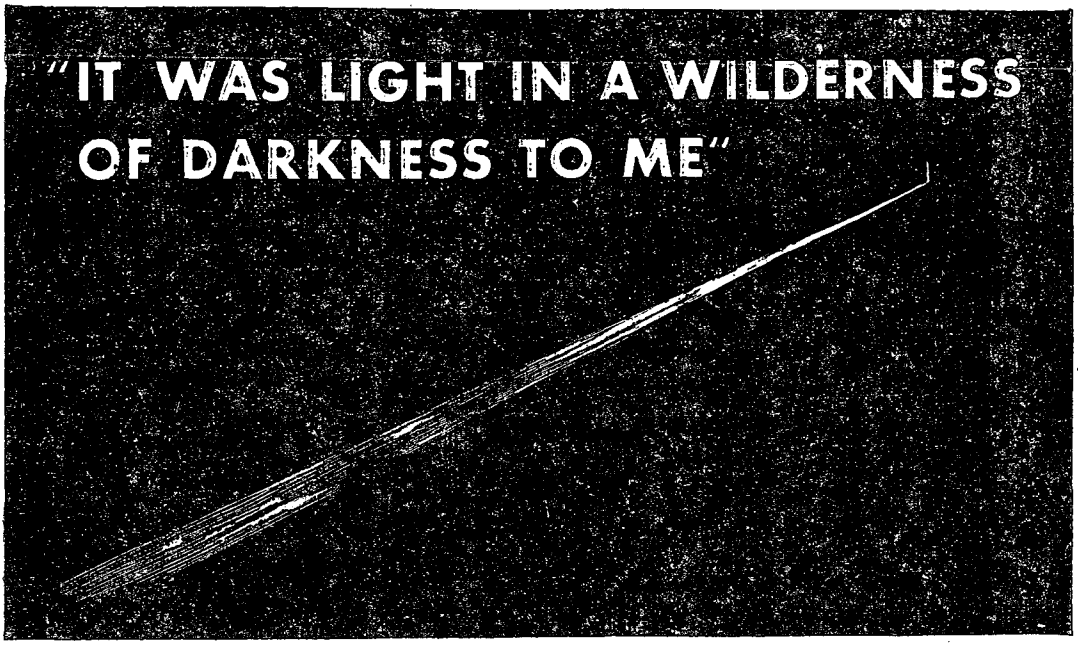

"I WAS STUCK. A wife and three kiddies—and the same old pay envelope. I couldn't see a thing ahead except the same old grind. Then one day I read an I. C. S. ad. The coupon fascinated me. A new idea struck me—it was a light in a wilderness of darkness to me! Today, because I mailed that coupon two years ago, I am a trained man—making a trained man's pay!"

Does this suggest something to you? Then mail the coupon today!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 2190-F, SCRANTON, PENNA.

☆ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X. ☆

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☐ Architect	☐ Heat Treatment of Metals	☐ Plumbing ☐ Steam Fitting	☐ Bridge Engineer
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☐ Building Estimating	☐ Telegraph Engineer	☐ Air Conditioning	☐ Chemistry
☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Telephone Work ☐ Radio	☐ Steam Engineer	☐ Pharmacy
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☐ Boilermaker	☐ Refrigeration	☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Poultry Farming

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☐ Office Management	☐ Bookkeeping	☐ First Year College	☐ High School Subjects
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Name.....*Age*.....*Address*.....

City.....*State*.....*Present Position*.....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

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DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

TITLE REGISTERED U. S. PATENT OFFICE

Formerly FLYNN'S

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The Magazine With the Detective Shield on the Cover Is On Sale Every Wednesday

THE RED STAR NEWS COMPANY — 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y.
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President — THEODORE PROEHL, Treasurer
MESSAGERIES HACHETTE — PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.
3, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4 — 111 Rue Réaumur

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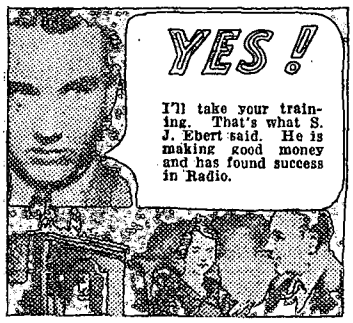
Read what happened to these two men when I said:



I will Train You at Home in Spare Time for a GOOD JOB IN RADIO

These two fellows had the same chance. Each clipped and sent me a coupon, like the one in this ad. They got my book on Radio's opportunities. S. J. Ebert, 104-B Quadrangle, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, saw that Radio offered him a real chance. He enrolled. The other fellow, whom we will call John Doe, wrote that he wasn't interested. He was just one of those fellows who wants a better job, better pay, but never does anything about it. One of the many who spend their lives in a low-pay, no-future job, because they haven't the ambition, the determination, the action it takes to succeed.

But read what S. J. Ebert wrote me and remember that John Doe had the same chance: "Upon graduation I accepted a job as serviceman, and within three weeks was made Service Manager. This job paid me $40 to $50 a week compared with $18 I earned in a shoe factory before. Eight months later I went with station KWCR as operator. From there I went to KTNT. Now I am Radio Engineer with WSUI. I certainly recommend the N. R. I. to all interested in the greatest field of all, Radio."

"I WANT TO HELP YOU. If you are earning less than $30 a week I believe I can raise your pay. However, I will let you decide that. Let me show you what I have done for others, what I am prepared to do for you. Get my book, read it over, and decide one way or another."

J. E. Smith

Get Ready for Jobs Like These. Many Radio Experts Make $30, $50, $75 a Week

Do you want to make more money? Broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to $5,000 a year. Spare time Radio set servicing pays as much as $200 to $500 a year—full time Radio servicing jobs pay as much as $30, $50, $75 a week. Many Radio Experts own their own full time or part time Radio businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, paying up to $6,000 a year. Radio operators on ships get good pay and see the world besides. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio and loud speaker systems offer good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises many good jobs soon. Men who have taken N. R. I. Training are holding good jobs in all these branches of Radio.

Many Make $5, $10, $15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

Practically every neighborhood needs a good spare time serviceman. The day you enroll I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets. They show you how to do Radio repair jobs that you can cash in on quickly. Throughout your training I send you plans and ideas that have made good spare time money for hundreds of fellows. I send you special Radio equipment and show you how to conduct experiments and build circuits which illustrate important Radio principles. My training gives you valuable, practical experience, while learning.

Get My 64-Page Book Free

Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to anyone over 16 years old. It describes Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my Training for Radio and Television; shows you actual letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning; tells about my Money Back Agreement. MAIL THE COUPON in an envelope, or paste it on a penny postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute,
Dept. 6KK Washington, D. C.

MAIL THIS NOW

FOR FREE BOOK OF FACTS ABOUT RADIO

J. E. SMITH, President, National Radio Institute, Dept. 6KK, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out the spare time and full time opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home in spare time to become Radio Experts. (Please write plainly.)

Name ..... Age .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

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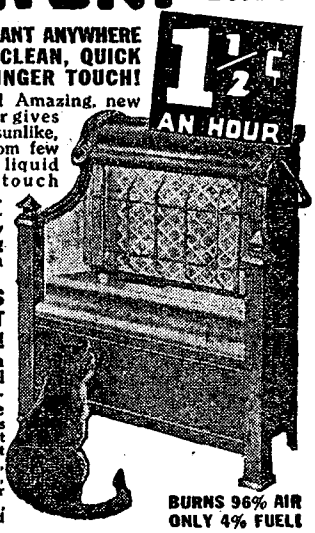

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Why fuss with dirty stoves, coal or wood, tangling cord or tube heaters when this beautiful Radiant gives you more heat for less money, needs no bulky fuel, leaves no dirt or ashes, is portable, and can be used anywhere.

BURNS 96% AIR ONLY 4% FUEL!

30-DAY HOME TRIAL IF YOU ACT NOW!

On our special introductory offer, you can get the new Radiant for 30 days, to know why thousands of owners praise its remarkable heating efficiency and economy. The special low price amazes all! Write TODAY for full details!

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Complete with batteries and newest type reflector bulb. Ready for instant use. Strong, steady light. Useful everywhere. Order now.

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29x4.50-20	1.85	.85
30x4.50-21	1.95	.95
28x4.75-19	1.85	.95
29x4.75-20	2.10	.95
29x5.00-19	2.25	1.05
30x5.00-20	2.40	1.05
5.25-17	2.45	1.15
28x5.25-18	2.45	1.15
29x5.25-19	2.45	1.15
30x5.25-20	2.50	1.15
31x5.25-21	2.90	1.15
5.50-17	2.75	1.15
28x5.50-18	2.75	1.15
29x5.50-19	2.75	1.15
6.00-17	2.85	1.15
30x6.00-18	2.85	1.15
31x6.00-19	2.85	1.15
32x6.00-20	2.95	1.25
33x6.00-21	3.10	1.35
32x6.50-20	3.20	1.35
6.00-16	3.15	1.45

TRUCK BALLOONS Size	Tires	Tubes
6.00-20	$3.10	$1.65
6.50-20	3.35	1.95
7.00-20	4.60	2.95
7.50-20	5.15	3.75

HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES Size	Tires	Tubes
30x5	$3.50	$1.95
32x6	6.95	2.75
34x7	8.95	3.25
38x7	9.45	3.95
36x8	9.65	3.95
40x8	11.60	4.15

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Artificial Ear Drum

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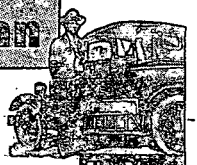

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AMAZING Facts for MEN

Nervous Debility, Frequent Night Rising, Leg Pains, Lame Back, Lumbago, Sexual Weakness, Kidney and Bladder Trouble, Chronic Constipation, Despondency, Restlessness at Night are only some of the ailments, differing in individuals, that can often be ascribed to lesion of the Prostate Gland.

THOUSANDS AFFLICTED

Thousands of men in every community suffer from these ailments, weaknesses and other physical shortcomings without knowing that very frequently they are caused by prostatic failure.

MANY DOCTORS ENDORSE MASSAGE

Massaging for the alleviation of Prostate Trouble is as old as time, and some of the most outstanding authorities in the medical profession recommend massage as a safe effective treatment. (See Reference Book of the Medical Sciences, Vol. VII, 3rd Edition.)

USE "PROSAGER"

—a new invention which enables any man to massage his Prostate Gland in the privacy of his home. It often brings relief with the first treatment and must help or it costs you nothing. No Drugs or Electricity.

Dr. W. D. Smith
INVENTOR

UNSOLICITED LETTERS OF GRATITUDE

The following are extracts from letters received, which are on file in our office; the complete letters and addresses will be sent to anyone who is interested in inquiring for them.

Mr. Wm. F. Lemon, San Francisco, California, writes: "After using the Prosager I am well again and feel none of the symptoms of Prostate Trouble." Mr. Wm. F. Lee, Washington, D. C., states in his letter: "The Prosager is mild, I would not be without it."

Mr. Henry Zitman, Auburn, Indiana, says: "I will say this much for the Prosager, it has saved me from an operation. The Doctor that treated me before I got it says it is a fine thing to use. If there is any one in this territory that wants to know about it, direct them to me." Mr. Judson Trefethan, New Castle, N. H., writes about the Prosager: "I think it is a great invention, my Doctor came to see it and he said it was a good invention."

FREE BOOKLET Explains Vital Details and Our TRIAL OFFER

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MIDWEST PRODUCTS CO., B-1410, Kalamazoo, Mich.

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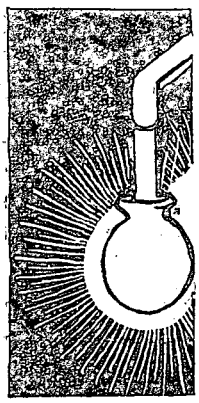
WONDER LIGHT!



A miraculous invention brings you new home lighting far better than electricity or old wick lamp at fraction of the cost. Fill your home with soft, brilliant, non-flickering white light for hours at few cents cost! Enjoy this amazing new light without the fuss of wicks to trim, chimneys to clean and break, or tangling cords or wires! Carry it anywhere. HOME TRIAL for 30 days at our risk before deciding. Your choice of beautiful art lamp models at direct-factory prices! WRITE TODAY!

AGENTS! Big Money-Maker Write at once!

AKRON LAMP & MFG. CO.
510 Lamp Bldg. Akron, Ohio

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

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The March

(NOTE: It is the purpose of this department to warn readers in all sections of the country of the latest schemes designed to defraud them, and in many instances, the names and descriptions of the operators. If you are approached by any of these schemers, get all the information possible and report the circumstances immediately to your local police authorities. They will know what to do. Rest assured that you will be doing someone a favor. Man is the only animal that can be skinned more than once.)

VENDING MACHINES

F. T. C. Exposes Deceptive Practices

WILLARD F. MAIN, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, trading as W. F. Main Co., The Machen Co., Standard Mercantile Co., Appleton Novelty Co., and New Specialty Co., is charged in a Federal Trade Commission complaint with making false representations in advertising matter, testimonials and through assertions made by his salesmen which deceive purchasers of his vending machines.

Among other things, the complaint charges that earnings from the machines do not average a minimum of two dollars a month each; that Main's contract contains so many provisions with which purchasers must comply that it is impossible for them to obtain the benefit of the repurchase agreement which forms a part of the "refund agreement"; that the 120 per cent profit agreement is a snare and a subterfuge; and that Main refuses credit to purchasers of his machines as he promises. "Exclusive territory" promised the buyer is violated by Main, according to the complaint, who, operating under various trade names, sells machines to different purchasers within the supposedly "exclusive territory." In other words, the purchaser of machines from the Standard Mercantile Co. under an "exclusive" contract for New York County may find himself in competition with a man who has purchased the same machines from The Machen Co. under another "exclusive contract."

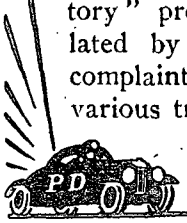
AUTOMOBILES

The "Own a New Car Club"

ROBERT SAMUELS tried to interest San Franciscans in a variation of the old chain-letter scheme which may later be tried in other cities. Samuels was convicted in Judge Dunn's court and that stopped the racket in San Francisco.

Holding out the lure of winning a $750 automobile through the payment of one dollar and the sale of additional dollar tickets to friends, Samuels was only fairly started on his promotion when the police took him to the cooler. He later admitted that only those joining the "club" at the outset would share in any profits, while later investors would get nothing.

"Thirty days," said Judge Dunn, and then suspended execution of the sentence on Samuels' promise to



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# of Crime

abandon the scheme. Samuels may not know it, but this is the same plan that Oscar Auton used to sell carriages in Gagetown, Mich., back in the 1890's. He met disaster, too.

FRAUDS
"Job" Agencies Get Their Orders

CONTINENTAL SYSTEM, Gary, Ind., International Airway Bureau, Milwaukee, Wis., Midwest Advertising Co., Wichita, Kans., Scharf Bureau, New York City, and Temple Airway Bureau, Milwaukee, Wis., have all recently been subjects of fraud orders issued by the Post Office Department.

Holding out the promise of employment in one form or another in their advertisements, these companies exacted a fee from those who responded, but none of them had any employment to offer.

There are a number of other advertisers in this field who are now under investigation by the Government, so watch out for your dollars!

CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL
Utilities Engineering Subject of Complaint

UTILITIES ENGINEERING INSTITUTE, 404 N. Wells St., Chicago, with a branch office at 841 Broadway, New York City, is the subject of a Federal Trade Commission complaint which alleges that they use advertisements in newspapers so worded as to conceal the fact that only a correspondence school course is offered for sale and have deceived prospective purchasers into believing that they are in a position to offer employment, when such is not the fact.

By means of other allegedly false representations, they are said to induce prospects to sign contracts in the belief that they will be provided with jobs while taking the course of instruction and with permanent positions upon completing the course. The complaint also alleges that other claims are untrue, namely, that the plan of training is made possible through the coöperation of leading firms manufacturing electric refrigeration and air conditioning products, and that officials of such companies serve as an advistory board,* contributing their time and assistance to the conduct of the school's business.

LABELS
Salesman Uses Fictitious Address

H. POINDEXTER, who uses 341 Forsythe St., Jacksonville, Fla., as a home address, has been mulcting Baltimore business men by taking deposits on stamps, labels and seals which are not delivered. Mail addressed to him at Jacksonville is returned to senders marked: *Unknown.*

*Note: The spelling of the word "advistory" follows exactly the spelling in the Federal Trade Commission's press release.

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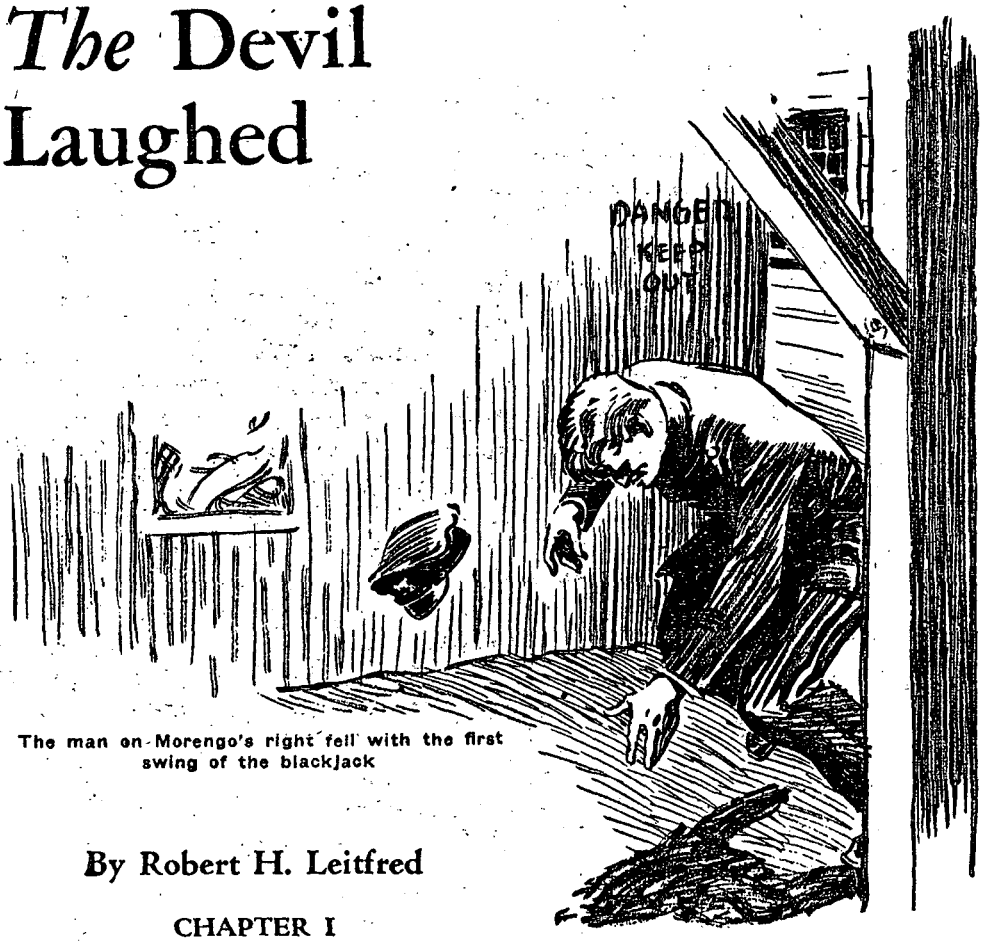
The Devil Laughed



The man on Morengo's right fell with the first swing of the blackjack

By Robert H. Leitfred

CHAPTER I

Contact

ED KIRBY cut the air on the pneumatic drill and carried it to the tool shed. The motor on the compressor coughed a couple times then went dead. The day's work was over. He joined the other workers as they climbed out of the shale-rock excavation sixty feet below the sidewalk level.

From the pocket of his whipcord breeches he took out a handkerchief and wiped his moist face. Men were all around him crowding, making coarse jokes and smoking.

Ed nodded casually to some of the workers he had known only a few days. But he didn't have a word to say to any of them. He merely looked. All day long he had looked at new workers coming on the job, searching for a face stamped on his memory. There was about him an air of infinite patience.

A big man—Kirby, with blond hair, a lean jaw and grayish-blue eyes set deep into cavernous sockets. His upper body was naked and brown. He found his shirt and coat on the upper level and pulled them on.

Then he joined a line in front of the

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The other officer got his a split-second later

paymaster's window. He had no pay coming. He got his pay through the Bureau of Criminal Investigation of the Department of Justice. But he received a pay envelope from the clerk behind the tiny window which he shoved carelessly in his pocket. The envelope, he knew, had nothing in it but blank paper. Then he took a position close to a rack of steel girders.

G-Man Ed Kirby Takes His Life in His Hands to Play a Judas Rôle in a Murder Ring

His eyes were on the faces of the men standing in line for their turn at the window. He watched them one after the other until the line had diminished to one man. Then three or four stragglers joined it, one of them in a blue serge suit. At sight of this last man, Ed Kirby suddenly became tense.

His grayish-blue eyes twitched. A grim smile puckered the corners of his lips. Dip Morengo had joined the line. No doubt about the gunman's identity. Kirby had memorized the man's face from photographs. He had a thin, pointed nose, bloodless lips, ears that were plastered flat against his head, and there was a slight trace of furtiveness about him. Morengo had come for his pay.

Ed Kirby moved fast—not towards Morengo, but through a gate in the

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high fence surrounding the excavation. He raised his arm in a pre-arranged signal to two men in police uniforms across the street. They sauntered towards Kirby but seemed wholly unaware of him. Three of the stragglers came through the gate. The officers ignored them. Morengo came through. Kirby's head nodded ever so slightly.

The men in uniform converged upon Dip Morengo whose eyes slitted as he saw them and guessed their intentions.

"'Don't make any trouble, Morengo," clipped one of the officers. "You're coming with us. You're wanted at headquarters."

They ran their hands over his body. No guns. They grabbed his arms and hustled him beneath an overhead platform covering the sidewalk towards a side street. Ed Kirby followed close behind. The officers with their prisoner were not moving very fast. Ed overtook them just as they were turning the corner.

From the pocket of his coat he took a vicious-looking leather blackjack. But it wasn't as formidable as it appeared. There was nothing but soft cotton beneath the leather. He slugged the man on Morengo's right with the first uplift of his arm. The second officer whirled. The blackjack caught him on the side of the neck, staggering him. Ed socked him again before the officer could recover his balance. He sank to the sidewalk.

"Gee!" snarled Kirby, pocketing the leather weapon, "how I hate these bulls." He wiped the back of a dirty hand across his mouth. "Beat it, fellow. Move fast, or we'll get jammed!"

Morengo hadn't said a word. Half way down the street, Ed Kirby grabbed him by the arm. "Down here," he said, dragging him into a cluttered alley.

Behind them they could hear a confusion of voices, then the shrill tremolo of a police whistle. Kirby pushed his way through a stack of trash boxes to a screen door. He opened it and crowded through. Morengo came in with him.

They were in a steaming kitchen. A cook turned from his range and nodded to Kirby.

"How are yuh, chef?" Ed called out. "I'm bringing in a friend."

"'Sure," grinned the cook. "Good supper tonight."

ED led the way through a swinging door to the back part of the eating house. He had taken many meals there and was thoroughly familiar with its arrangements. He waved to a waiter. "'Two suppers. Make the service snappy. And a couple bottles of beer."

The beer came at once. Then hot plates of food.

"Why?" began Morengo, speaking for the first time, "the rush?"

Ed Kirby took a drink of his beer. "Eat, fellow. The cops will be here any minute now—not those I knocked out, but others. Make it look like we've been here a long time."

As they started to eat, two police officers came through the front door. One of them spoke to the cashier. Kirby and Morengo could see the cashier shake his head from side to side. The second officer walked half way back between the tables, shrugged and went forward again. Then they left.

Ed Kirby drank the rest of his beer and lit a cigarette. "Scram, guy! The heat's cooled off."

Morengo leaned back in his chair. His slitted eyes studied the grayish-blue ones of his rescuer. "And who the hell are *you?*" he asked.

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"Kirby," said Ed, "if it means anything to you."

"It doesn't."

"That's okay by me. Didn't expect it would."

"You working on the Starret job?"

Ed nodded. "Rock driller. Had to grab something in a hurry. Blew into New York again a week ago from the West Coast. Got hot out there, and I figured the change would prolong my health. Grabbed this job till something better comes along."

"I see." Dip Morengo relaxed in his chair. "I was on that Starret job myself till last week. I had some back pay coming so I dropped in to get it."

Ed Kirby said nothing. He hunched down in his chair and stared towards the front windows.

"A driller, eh?" resumed Morengo. "Do any of that work out west?"

"Whose business is it what I did?" Ed's voice took on a sudden edge.

"Don't get jumpy, guy. You got me out of a jam. Guys don't usually slug cops. . . ."

"Me," broke in Ed Kirby, flatly. "I'd slug a cop any time I had the chance. They rile me—cops and G-men!"

Morengo laid the palm of his right hand on the table and absently tapped the cloth with his fingers. "There might be an opening for you here in this town, Kirby."

"Ummm!"

"Where you staying?"

"Blackmoor Hotel."

"That's a dive. A guy with ability ought to have an apartment with a swell-looking moll running the place."

"Not on a driller's pay."

A thin laugh parted Morengo's bloodless lips. "Guys in this town call me Dip Morengo. But I ain't no dip, see?"

Ed Kirby didn't see and said so. "If you ain't a pickpocket what the hell are you?"

Morengo had no answer to this one. A silence fell between the two men so suddenly brought together. Finally Morengo pushed his chair back. "I'm leaving," he announced.

Ed Kirby didn't change his slouched position by as much as a hair. "Oke," he said.

Morengo got halfway to the cashier's desk, thought of something, then hurried back. A waiter came to the table. Both reached it at the same time.

"Another bottle of beer," said Kirby.

"And give me the check," added Morengo.

Ed Kirby shrugged. Morengo vanished.

CHAPTER II

Up a Step

THE Blackmoor Hotel on Twenty-eighth Street was dull and ugly as seen from the street. It was even more ugly in the lobby. There were four leather chairs facing the front windows. A short counter with a grilled ironwork protecting the cashier's desk. A rack for keys. Some mail boxes, and a single telephone booth. There was an elevator and a spiral staircase leading upstairs.

Ed Kirby came in about eight o'clock. The night clerk, a man with a pock-marked face, took a key from the rack and handed it to him without a word. Kirby saw that the elevator wasn't in the shaft, so he went up to the third floor by the stairs.

His room, 309, was at the front end of the building facing the street. In it was a bed, a bureau, a small table, a connecting bath, and two chairs.

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He took off his work clothes and stepped under the shower. Then he shaved and put on a dark suit. The coat proved too warm. He took it off. In his shirt sleeves he sat down at the table, took a deck of cards from a small drawer, and dealt himself a hand of Canfield.

After a time he had six bottles of beer sent up. He drank the beverage slowly, flicking the cardboards in their appointed places. He knew that his chief in the Field Office would be waiting for a report. But Kirby wasn't ready to make any. Not yet.

It was close to nine when he heard the clang of the elevator door in the hall outside. It occurred to him that he was going to have a visitor. Without a word having been said, he knew that Morengo would come to the hotel.

Steps sounded outside the door and stopped. Someone knocked. Kirby's eyes raised. "Come in," he called.

He was still holding cards in his hand when Morengo and a stocky man with a cherubic face entered.

Ed Kirby looked surprised at seeing Morengo. "Hello," he said. "You again?"

"Yeah," said Morengo. "It's me—and a friend. A guy you ought to know. He can do things for you."

Kirby flipped the cards to the table. "So."

Morengo made the introduction. "Kirby, this is a good friend of mine—Joe Wyman, owner of the best gyp-joint in town—the Golden Mirror."

"Glad to meet you, Wyman," said Ed. "Heard about your place in Denver, New Orleans and Detroit."

Joe Wyman's cherubic face broke into a wooden smile. "You must move around a lot, Kirby."

"I do. Have to the way I'm fixed."

"Working?"

"Was—if I haven't lost my job with the Starret people. Someone might have turned me in for getting sore and slugging two cops. There were plenty of men around who knew me by sight."

"How'd you like to work for me as a bouncer? I need someone who is tough and can take it."

"Thanks," said Ed, shaking his head. "It'd bore me stiff. I don't get any kick handling suckers and drunks."

"Spoken like a gentleman," broke in a strange voice. The hall door had opened. Framed in the opening stood a tall man in a dress suit. His face was flushed. "Drunks and suckers. That's me. Hi, Joe, you old bandit you. Rye. I want rye. Get a bottle of it. Get a case!"

Joe Wyman sighed. "Monty, what the hell you doing here?"

"I saw you come in from the street. 'Scuse the hiccups! Followed. Thought you were opening a new place. Didn't want to be left out. Not Monty." He turned and bowed low from the hips towards Ed Kirby.

Had the other two men seen Monty's face, they might have wondered why his left eyelid drooped ever so cunningly in a wink.

Monty straightened. He was a perfect gentleman at all times. "Sorry to intrude, sir. Truly. My mistake. The liquor they serve nowadays is abominable." He grinned. "Off we go. See you later, Joe." He turned around in the door opening, weaved, belched and went humming down the hall to the elevator.

But Ed had not forgotten Monty's drooping eyelid, and the meaning it conveyed. "Nice boy friend," he observed. "Where'd you pick him up?"

"He just happened," said Wyman. "One of those playboys you hear about. But he spends plenty in my place as well as in other night clubs,

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so I put up with his foolishness. He's a nut I guess. Well, I think I'll move on. No harm in offering you that job, Kirby?"

"Not a bit, Wyman. Thanks."

"I'm staying for a few minutes, Joe," said Morengo as he opened the door for his friends. "See you later."

He closed the door after the owner of the night club had left, and took the chair Wyman had vacated. "You turned down a good job, Kirby. There's plenty of gravy in being a bouncer at the Golden Mirror—plenty of rich gravy."

"I'm not looking for gravy," said Kirby. "What I want is meat."

"Tough pickings in this town."

"I can wait."

"Know any big shots around here, Kirby?"

Ed shook his head. "I've been away for a couple years and I just got back. No, I don't seem to be acquainted no more."

"Who did you work for on the West Coast?"

"What is this—an inquisition?"

"I'm trying to get a line on you. Maybe you're regular. Maybe you're a damned Federal . . ."

Ed Kirby got to his feet. His eyes were shot with danger signals. He grabbed Morengo by the collar, lifted him bodily from the chair and struck him in the face. Morengo jerked free and backed away.

Morengo's right hand whipped beneath the lapel of his coat. But before he could get within touching distance of his armpit holster Ed Kirby's left hand streaked forward. And Morengo found himself staring into the black muzzle of an automatic.

A faint smile of derision parted Kirby's lips. "When you start calling me names, Morengo—learn to smile. Now, put the notion out of your head that you're going to pump lead into me. It won't work. For I should hate to leave this hotel just because I shot a guy. That's how it stands between us, Morengo. And I don't hold no grudge."

There was something close to admiration in Morengo's slitted eyes. "You'll do, Kirby," he said. "If the boss wants someone to vouch for you, I'll do it myself." His hand emerged from under his coat—empty.

"Boss?" Ed Kirby's eyebrows lifted. "You mean Joe Wyman?"

"Hell, no!" Morengo laughed. "I'm talking about the Big Guy."

"Oh!" Ed Kirby sat down and poured himself a glass of beer. "Help yourself, Morengo. I don't know who the Big Guy is you're talking about. I'm not asking you. I don't give a damn. See? I'm open for business with this Big Guy. But I do things my own way. And I work at my trade. My job is my alibi. Dicks never bother a guy with a steady job."

"Yeah," nodded Morengo. "I feel the same way. Right now I'm working on the tunnel job under the East River. Timekeeper. I'm in strong with the office superintendent. If you get canned from the Starret job, come down to the river. And I'll see that you're taken care of."

"Thanks," said Ed. "Maybe I'll do that little thing."

Dip Morengo rubbed the stubble on his chin. "I wish," he mumbled, "I knew what those two cops wanted of me. It's got me worried. They ain't got nothing on me. I'm in the clear."

"You and me are never in the clear. What do you care what they wanted of you? It would have been plenty if they once got you down to headquarters."

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Dip Morengo shook his head. "Not with the mouthpiece the Big Guy would furnish me. I've been through the mill before. But it gets me—what in hell did those cops want when they nailed me?"

"Don't ask me."

Morengo didn't, again. Nor did he say anything more about the Big Guy. Between them they finished the beer, talked about various rackets, women and firearms, then Morengo got to his feet.

"Do like I say, Kirby. If the Starret people let you out, or you think it's too hot to report for work in the morning, come down to the tunnel. I'll fix things like I said."

"That's a swell idea," agreed Kirby.

ALONE, after Morengo had left, Ed Kirby resumed his game of solitaire. At ten o'clock he got up, yawned, stretched in full view of the window, then switched off the light.

But he didn't immediately go to bed. Instead, he pulled a chair close to the window and stared out into the lighted street. His mind went over everything leading up to his living in this miserable room, eating in cheap restaurants and working as a skilled mechanic on construction jobs.

A new racket had sprung up in the city and other cities as well. Murder at prices ranging from five hundred to ten thousand—depending, of course, on victim and his standing. This new racket did away with numberless gangs. In some cities certain gangs had been wiped out by the new order of hired killers. Money was paid on the spot. The murder generally took place within twenty-four hours.

The city police had requested help from the Department of Justice because this racket, unless curbed, would soon become nation-wide. Two politicians, an assistant district attorney, and one G-man had already been rubbed out—murdered in cold blood at an agreed price.

Others were undoubtedly due for sudden extinction, among them was G-man Nelson Grant. Quiet, courageous, and shunning all contacts with crooks and murderers, he was the exact opposite of Ed Kirby. But his distaste for publicity could not keep him from being known, feared and hated. Grant was born to riches, with talents that far exceeded Kirby's. Yet he and Kirby had always worked together through failure and success, linked by a friendship sealed many times in the past in blazing bursts of gunfire from an aroused gangdom.

But Nelson Grant had disappeared. The murder racketeers were trying desperately to trace him. In time they'd uncover him, unless . . .

Ed Kirby smiled bleakly in the dark. His thoughts at that moment were not on his friend, Nels Grant, but on another man entirely—the so-called Big Guy. For weeks he had been running down one lead after another. Without exception they had all ended at the blank wall of utter failure.

And then, under grilling, a vicious little rat-bookie had unconsciously dropped a hint that led to Morengo. And tonight, through trickery, Ed Kirby had won the respect of Morengo. Would his patient combing of all the dark alleys of crookdom end as before against the usual blank wall of defeat?

Ed Kirby got up slowly, stretched his big frame out on the bed, placed his automatic close to his hip, and closed his eyes. The constant strain of his precarious existence would not allow him to relax. The tiny muscles beneath his eyes jerked continuously.

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He wondered as he lay there in the dark if the end of his search for the murder ring was not closer than it seemed. Would he be asked to join the gang in their butchery of human beings? He hoped so—and he even prayed that it would be soon, before other men were shot down by these commercial butchers.

Then he fell asleep, and his body jerked with muscular spasms. He woke up. Beads of sweat were on his forehead. He turned over on his side, felt for the reassuring chunk of metal beneath his hip, and dropped to sleep again.

CHAPTER III

The Big Shot Waits

THE distance between the Blackmoor and the lunchroom where Ed Kirby ate his breakfast was about two blocks. But before Ed had covered it the next morning he discovered he was being followed.

The knowledge was pleasing. It meant that certain people thought he was worth watching. His play in freeing Morengo from the cops was bringing results. They were watching him to see what contacts he made—if any. Kirby knew then that he must keep away from telephones, that he must not try to contact his chief unless absolutely sure that he wasn't being watched.

The deception must be continued until the last barrier of suspicion was down. There was no other way to gain the confidence of the murder ring. He must continually act the part of a hard, vicious enemy of law and order.

After breakfast he went to the construction job where he had been working. A chunky man in a gray suit accosted him near the gate.

"Kirby?" he asked, speaking without moving his lips.

"Why not. Who the hell are you?"

"Never mind who I am. I was sent here. Don't go through the gate. I guess you know why."

"Maybe I do. Maybe I don't."

"There's a couple of headquarters men in there. They know who it was that helped Morengo get into the clear."

Ed Kirby's smile was slow in coming. He knew the man was lying. But he didn't know why this was so unless they wanted him to be working closer to Morengo. He lit a cigarette. "Oke. Thanks for the tipoff." He decided then that his cue was to get in touch with Morengo. This fitted in with his plans perfectly.

The man in the gray suit said, "So long!" and went down a side street.

Ed took the nearest subway downtown to where the tunneling operations under East River had just begun. A caisson had been sunk near the river's edge in the quicksands. It was a huge thing of riveted metal slabs that rested on the shifting sands many feet below the ground level. There was a wooden building near the street, and Dip Morengo, with time cards in his hands, lounged against it.

"'Lo, Kirby," he said.

Ed nodded. "A guy in a gray suit tipped me off to stay away from the Starret job. So I came here."

"I got it fixed," said Morengo. "The gang is ready to go down. This is your shift."

Kirby followed him inside the workings. Here Morengo left him. With about eighteen other men, Ed Kirby entered a compression lock—a steel cylinder eight feet in diameter and probably twenty feet in length. The bottom end of this lock connected with

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a hollow, metal shaft that ran down to the working chamber at the bottom of the caisson.

With others of the work crew, he seated himself on one of the parallel benches inside the lock. The foreman closed the metal door leading outside, sealing the chamber within. Another man opened a valve controlling the air. Into the lock rushed a blast of furnace heat. Kirby could feel it pressing against his eyes, nose and ears. Then the first discomfort of compression was over.

The pressure dial after a time indicated forty pounds of compressed air—the same pressure as in the working chamber below. When sufficient time had elapsed, a door leading to the vertical shaft was opened, and the sand hogs crawled down the metal rungs fastened to its steep sides.

It was a long way down to the working chamber. Ed Kirby was sweating freely when he reached the bottom. The other gang was just coming out. Through the haze caused by the fluctuating air pressure, he could see the face of the metal shield that was going to go through the caisson wall and thence under the river. But before that shield could go through, an opening had to be cut into the tough metal. Men with torches would do this work—a little at a time. It was a job that called for patience, skill and an utter disregard for personal comfort.

The air in the chamber was heated to a high temperature. Water had been allowed to seep in for immersion purposes when human bodies became over-heated. Ed Kirby knew what he was about. At a nod from the boss he took a blow torch from the hands of another man, pulled on goggles, snapped the lighter and got a flame. Skillfully he adjusted it till the flame was a thin, purplish-blue spear of heat.

He looked around him then. There was a half-naked man standing behind him with a hose in his hands. He waved to Kirby. All this man had to do during the one-hour shift was to squirt water on Kirby's back and shoulders.

The flame from Kirby's torch scorched a section of the caisson wall, chewed into it, digested it and flung back a shower of molten sparks. Ed swayed backwards, knocked the glowing chunks of metal from his shirt and continued to bore with the tiny flame.

Metal kept flicking against his shoulders. The man with the hose watched him constantly and sprayed him with water. But under that terrific pressure, things burned as though in a blast furnace. Ed's wet shirt presently burst into flames. He cut his torch and flung himself into the brackish water covering the floor. Already he had two blisters on his shoulders.

He picked up his torch again and adjusted the flame. Again sparks leaped and sizzled around his body. After a time he had a section cut through, and sand was pressing through from the opposite side of the caisson wall. Miners came up and fitted short planks against the opening, bracing them firmly.

Ed Kirby went on with his boring. He had worked under pressure before, and knew how to conserve his strength. At the end of the shift, his hands were smarting as he climbed the metal rungs for the decompression chamber above. Forty minutes were spent in the lock before his body became accustomed to normal air pressure.

"Five hours off," spoke the superintendent to Kirby, "then your shift goes down again. Think you'll stay with us?"

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Kirby nodded. "Sure." Out of the corner of his eye he saw a company phone. He wanted to use that instrument. But he didn't dare. Morengo was standing only a few feet away.

Morengo came towards him. At a nearby restaurant they had beer and sandwiches. They talked of other contracts they had worked on to kill time. Finally Kirby said: "I might not be able to hold this job, Morengo. There was a guy tailing me this morning. I don't know whether he belonged to the police or the government mob. I don't like being followed."

"Yeah? Well, he don't work for either of them."

Ed laughed thinly. "You telling *me?*"

"That's what I said. The guy that was tailing you doesn't work for either mob. I know."

"My mistake," acknowledged Kirby. "Then who the hell does he work for? And why is he gumshoeing around . . .?"

"Quit asking questions!" Morengo snapped.

"Check!" said Ed Kirby, evenly.

For three days, Ed was constantly aware of the man who followed him wherever he went. On the fourth day, his shadow was gone. Still wary, Ed kept away from all phones, seldom spoke to anybody outside his fellow workers, and minded his own business. It was time, he reasoned, for the Big Guy to show his hand.

ED KIRBY came out of the bathroom Saturday night after supper and dressed carefully in a dark suit. Barely had he finished when Morengo knocked on the door and pushed into the room.

"The Big Guy wants to see you," he announced.

Kirby showed no surprise. "Wyman?"

"No."

Ed knotted his tie with exaggerated care. "Suppose, bright boy, I'm not anxious to meet this Big Guy you keep telling about? After all I've got a good job. Things are quiet. I'm not worrying about cops placing their dirty paws on my shoulder."

"You'll be turning down heavy dough, Kirby. Another thing." Dip Morengo lowered his voice. "It might not be wise, or healthy, Kirby, to turn down the offer from the Big Shot."

Ed Kirby considered. "There's *that* angle, too. And I like money. I like plenty of it in my fist when I go out to have a good time in a swell joint like Joe Wyman's. I'll bet there's some grand janes hanging out in his place." He fitted a felt hat to his head at a rakish angle. "Like a bottle of beer, fellow, before we start?"

"Naw. No time. There's a sedan waiting outside to pick us up." He took a leather case from his pocket and extracted a pair of dark-colored glasses constructed in such a way as to curve around the outer edges of the eyes. "The boss ain't sure of you, Kirby. You're new. Put these over your eyes. I know you won't be able to see. But that's what they're for. Maybe the next trip we make to see him you won't have to wear them."

Kirby's heart began to hammer against his ribs, but his voice was calm enough when he spoke. "Sure, Dip. Nothing like being careful. Your boss must be a big shot all right."

"He's got a swell racket, Ed. Absolutely new. With a few more good rod men in it, we'll be rich in a year."

Ed fitted the glasses over his eyes. "Can't see a damn thing," he complained. "Give me your arm, Dip."

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His free arm was close to his side, hand in his pocket. For a moment he hung back allowing Morengo to get ahead. Then his hand came out of his pocket and an ordinary playing card dropped inconspicuously to the curb and fell into the gutter—an ace of spades. Its special significance might be summed up in a single word: *Follow.*

The black sedan into which Kirby had entered moved slowly down the street. Monty, still clad in his dress suit, walked to the edge of the curb. His eyes saws the card lying face up. He signaled a cab, got in, and gave terse instructions to the driver.

CHAPTER IV

Murder to Order

ED KIRBY made no attempt to remember the various turnings made by the black sedan. When the machine came to a stop he didn't know whether he was uptown or downtown.

Clinging to Morengo's arm, he was pushed through a narrow door which slammed shut after him, then was guided into an elevator. As he stepped from the cage after a short ride no more than three floors, Morengo said: "Take off the blinders. We're here."

Kirby looked around. He was in a narrow hall. There was a door on the right side, closed. There was another at the far end, also closed. It opened, and a man came out into the hall—a man who walked with a shuffling movement on the sides of his feet.

"'Lo, Leon," called out Morengo. "I've brought Ed Kirby. The boss wants to look him over."

Leon nodded. "He's waiting for you. Come on in."

Kirby followed Leon through the door at the far end of the hall. As he passed through he heard Leon say: "This is Ed Kirby."

The room, Kirby could see, was large, and there were several doors opening from it, but no windows. Behind a low desk sat a man. A single word might best describe him—malignancy. He was deformed. His shoulders were twisted and hunched. His head was entirely bald. Within the depths of his sockets smouldered eyes that were like black tunnels. And his mouth was like a gash between nose and chin point.

The voice of the deformed man was sharp. He spoke without disturbing the gash that was his mouth. "Come closer, Kirby. Let me look you over. Ummm! How are you, Ed Kirby?" The gash twisted with a sardonic grimace.

Ed walked to a spot within touching distance of the desk. A wintry smile froze his face. "Just fine," he answered. "How are you?"

The black tunnel eyes seemed to retreat into their sockets. "I don't suppose you know who I am, do you, Kirby?"

Kirby turned his head sideways and back. "No, mister, I don't know who you are."

"I'm known by various names, Kirby—none of them important. To you and others I am Fleming. My organization is growing. I need new talent—men with nerve and brains. That's why I had you brought here."

Ed shrugged. "I didn't ask to be brought here."

"I was the one who sent for you. You saved one of my men, Morengo, from the cops. The only reason you did this, apparently, was because you hate cops. Right?"

"Right."

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"How would you like to work for my organization?"

"I've got a job, thanks."

"You can work for me between times—nights and on days off."

Ed studied the deformed man intently. "I still don't get where this talk is heading. Hell, let's place our cards on the table. I'm Ed Kirby. I've worked all parts of this country. I've been a bodyguard for a lot of big and little shots. I never tried to climb too high. And I've never been mugged and finger-printed. I'll work for a price. But it's got to be a big job or I won't touch it. I'm not a punk."

"I didn't think you were," observed Fleming, "or I wouldn't have sent for you. Few men ever get into this room, Kirby. And only a small fraction that get in know where the place is—only those I can trust. You got in. You're armed. You could kill me easily. But you'd never live to get out."

Ed Kirby yawned noisily. "So?"

Fleming smiled coldly. "Don't close your eyes, yet. I haven't finished." He took a package of currency from a desk drawer and tossed it to his desk top. "Fives, tens and twenties, Kirby—two grand in all."

Ed Kirby's eyes seemed to expand with greed.

Fleming noticed this and became more expansive. "You want this money, Kirby. And I want you to have it."

"I know, Fleming. I have to earn it. Well, I can. How?"

Fleming laid a snapshot on the desk, drew a heavy automatic from the desk drawer. "That's a picture of Detective Jim Rawlings of the Homicide Squad. Personally, I haven't a thing against Rawlings. But others—their identity need not concern you—want him removed. My organization handles little affairs of this kind—expertly and swiftly. The job requires a first-class gunman."

Ed wet his lips. His eyes were on the package of currency. Fleming's fingerprints would be on it—latent fingerprints, but valuable evidence. He rubbed the palms of his hands together. "When," he asked quietly, "do you want Rawlings bumped off?"

The murder-ring chieftain looked at his watch. "Rawlings leaves the Centre Street headquarters a little before eleven at night and goes over to Third Avenue for something to eat—unless he happens to be away on a case. But he isn't away tonight. Your job is to get him as he passes under the elevated."

CONSTRICTION tightened around Ed Kirby's throat. For a split second, he wondered if he could take the automatic Fleming was offering him and capture the members of the ring single-handed. But even as the cold metal came into his hand, he could see them spread in well-chosen positions all over the room. He couldn't hope to win out against such overwhelming odds.

The only things he could do was to play his cards as close to his chest as possible—which was too close for comfort—and to hope for the breaks later on. His voice was a trifle husky when he spoke:

"Okay, Fleming. I'll handle the bump-off of this headquarters dick. But in my own way. And when do I collect?"

"I'll arrange the payment through another party. You'll get your pay immediately I receive word of Jim Rawlings' demise. Clear?"

"Perfectly."

"Very well. That's all, Kirby."

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His bald head nodded dismissal. And that same sardonic contortion was twisting the gash that was his mouth as Ed Kirby pivoted and followed Morengo through the narrow hall to the elevator.

Here he put on the glasses. Holding Morengo's arm he went down the elevator. Between the time he passed through the door leading outside and stepping into the back of the sedan, a drunk in a dress suit got out of a taxi near the curb and broke into a ribald song:

"Drunk last night, drunk the night before,
Gonna get drunk tomorrow, like I never was before.
For when I'm drunk I'm happy as can be,
For I am a member of the souse fam—il—eee!"

The tenseness went out of Ed Kirby's face as he recognized the singer's voice. He relaxed on the back seat of the sedan. "Dip," he said, "I'm not going to have much time. I have to report for the 12 o'clock shift at the workings."

"Me, too, Ed. And I hate night work. It cuts into my good times."

The sedan braked to a stop half an hour later. The two men got out. And the machine pulled away—silently, and lost itself in the maze of night traffic.

"Take 'em off," said Morengo.

Ed removed the glasses and looked around. "Centre Street is a long ways from here," he said, looking at his watch. "You gonna stick with me and watch me turn on the heat when I bump Rawlings?"

"Not me. I'm hunting me an alibi. S'long, Kirby. Be seeing you."

Ed watched Morengo fade down a cross street, shrugged and hurried towards Broadway. Some distance downtown from where he left Morengo, he became aware of the fact that he was once more being followed. A frown darkened his face. This was one time he had no wish to be followed and watched.

He tried various dodges to make certain that he wasn't mistaken, then whirled and went back to where his follower stood looking at a window display. Argument was out of the question. Kirby hadn't the time nor the inclination. There was only one way to get rid of the man. He took it.

His knotted fist slammed into his follower's face. The man spun around and reached beneath the lapel of his coat. Kirby's left smacked him down. His head banged the sidewalk. Moaning, his lights went out.

A woman screamed hysterically. "Shut up!" rasped Kirby.

Bystanders crowded close. Ed stood over his victim, scowling, making no move to get away. From around the corner slewed a radio car. A cop jumped from the running board and thrust back the crowd.

"What's going on here?" he rapped out.

"This guy tried to nick me for my roll," lied Kirby.

"Yeah? Well, maybe I'd better take you both to the station, and you can shoot off your mouth there."

"I can do that, too," Ed grinned.

The station surgeon took charge of the still unconscious man, and Kirby was hustled before the lieutenant on desk duty. The lieutenant, blue-jowled and truculent, glared at Ed Kirby with suspicious eyes as the radio officer turned in an oral report.

"You want to make any charges?" the lieutenant asked of Kirby.

"No. Keep him locked up. Do him good. Can I use your phone?"

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The lieutenant called out mockingly to the sergeant at the signal monitor. "Hear that, Sergeant? He wants to use our telephone."

"I want," said Ed Kirby, grimly, "to talk with Dave Lawrence of the D. of J. And I want to talk fast. I'm in one hell of a yank."

Suspicion went out of the police lieutenant's eyes. "Why didn't you say all this in the first place?" he snapped.

Ed said nothing. He picked up the phone and spoke a number. "A slight misunderstanding," he told the voice that answered. "I'm in a mid-town precinct station. Fix it for me. Have them hold the prisoner till I send a man around. Good. I'll be right down to see you."

A few minutes later, Ed Kirby left the station by the back entrance. He entered a taxi and was driven to a drab-looking building near City Hall Park. Here he went inside to the offices of the C. I. Bureau of the Department of Justice.

David Lawrence, his chief, met him just inside the door. They gripped hands warmly. The faces of both men were grave. Briefly, for the time was growing short, Ed Kirby outlined his plan of action relative to the make-believe killing of Detective Jim Rawlings. The plan seemed fool-proof.

Lawrence nodded. "It ought to work."

Ed smiled heavily. "But understand, Dave," he told the chief, "I don't like this idea of working with these rats of the underworld even to get evidence."

Lawrence placed a kindly hand on the G-man's shoulder. "I know how you feel, Ed, but in the work we're doing, we're not supposed to have any feelings. Our job is to go out, collect evidence and convict. Smashing crime is our job. Forget it."

He took his hand from Kirby's shoulder and returned to his desk. "I'll assign Stevens and Weatherby to help you. You can tell them what you want. Meanwhile I'll get in touch with Rawlings."

As Kirby made ready to leave the office some minutes later, he faced the two clean-cut young agents who were to back his play. "Stevens, you're to keep me in sight all the time. We're handling dynamite tonight. If I make a single mistake, somebody's going to get hurt. As soon as I finish the job on lower Third Avenue, I'm going to the tunnel workings for my night shift. Hang around the place. Keep an eye on Morengo. See if anybody comes to see him. He's the timekeeper."

He turned to the other young agent. "Weatherby, I want you to be down on Third Avenue. When everything is over, and I'm in the clear, go at once to the precinct station commanded by Captain Burke. He'll point out a certain prisoner that's to be released. Tail him. See where he goes. It's important. Clear? Let's go."

Without speaking again, he left the building and headed for the subway, with Stevens and Weatherby trailing him not too far behind.

CHAPTER V

Slip-Up

DETECTIVE JIM RAWLINGS swung his big bulk from the curb at the exact moment an "L" train roared over the tracks above the avenue. He had just crossed the first pair of surface-car tracks beneath the "L" structure when Ed Kirby, gun in hand, stepped from behind a steel pillar.

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Mingling with the roar of the train going uptown came the staccato thunder of Kirby's .38 Colt automatic. Rawlings did not immediately fall, but lunged backwards and jerked his own gun from its holster on his hip, adding its booming to the reverberating thunder beneath the steel structure of the elevated. Then he grunted and collapsed into a big heap.

When a radio patrol car reached the scene a short time later, there was only the huddled body of big Jim Rawlings on the pavement and a crowd of the morbid curious.

The police herded them back from a too-searching investigation. Internes in white jackets hopped out of an ambulance that was miraculously close at hand, and Jim Rawlings was lifted to a stretcher and carried away.

But one man remained— long after the others had gone. He was the man in the gray suit who had warned Kirby away from the Starret job. He stood for some moments in danger of being struck by passing cabs, staring at the spot where Rawlings' body had rested on the pavement after the rattle of gunfire had died away.

Abruptly he knelt close to the reddish smear on the pavement. In the semi-darkness beneath the elevated that smear looked queer. His fingers pawed the pavement and closed around the rounded end of a thin, glass test tube. There was less than a quarter of an inch of the glass, and adhering to the sides was a clear liquid, almost a drop. He dipped his finger into the color and applied it to his tongue.

Sudden cunning gleamed in his eyes. The red stuff was not b l o o d. It was bitter to the taste—like ink. There were harsh glints in his eyes, and a savage twitching in his jaw muscles as he shoved both hands in his pockets and headed towards Bellevue Hospital where the ambulance had taken the body of Detective Rawlings.

Kirby's foolproof plan had developed a flaw. The cards had been cleverly stacked, but Rawlings had muffed the deal.

The young agent, Weatherby, meanwhile, had faded from the scene. He had remained only long enough to see Rawlings placed in the ambulance. Then he hailed a taxi and was driven to the mid-town precinct station. Ten minutes after his arrival the prisoner was released following the telephoned instructions from the Chief of the Bureau of Investigation. Weatherby obtained a good look at the man in the station house without himself being seen—or so he thought.

On the street once more, he trailed his quarry uptown to the Seventies—a region of basement restaurants and night clubs where the cab he was following came to a stop.

Still watching his man, Weatherby walked down on the opposite side of the cross street. There was a neon sign with small block letters: THE GOLDEN MIRROR near a canvas canopy stretching out over the walk. The man he was following went beyond the night club's canopied entrance and turned into a small parking lot adjoining the edge of the building.

Casually, W e a t h e r b y sauntered across the street, saw his man vanish behind a black sedan, then heard the distinct closing of a door that seemed to come from a spot beyond the sedan. Weatherby figured there must be a door in the brick wall of the building that was not visible from where he stood. He determined to investigate.

Alert to danger, he looked carefully around him. So far as he could see, there was no attendant watching the

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half-dozen cars parked on the small lot. He glanced cautiously up and down the cross street. No one was coming from either direction. It looked safe.

He walked into the parking place, edged around a gleaming Packard, followed the building wall with an outstretched hand towards the black sedan and a shadowy doorway that was dimly visible—then fell into the trap.

A darkish shape loomed up close to the running board of the sedan. An arm rose and fell. There was a muffled thud, and a thousand-watt light exploded in the exact center of Weatherby's head. A low gasp trembled on his lips. He clutched futilely at the brick wall, reeled, and slumped to his knees, stunned and without strength to fight back.

Hands curved under his armpits and dragged him through the door in the wall. The silence in the parking lot had hardly been disturbed.

LEON, Fleming's bodyguard, opened the hall door. "Berman's here," he said, "with a guy he slugged down on the lot."

The gash that was the deformed man's mouth twitched faintly. "Send them in," he ordered, curtly.

Berman entered, prodding the now fully conscious Weatherby with a gun. The young agent's face was pale. A thin trickle of blood had run down from his head across his cheek. He was a trifle unsteady on his feet.

"Who is he?" asked Fleming, quietly.

Berman shook his head. "I don't know any more than you do. Here's what happened. Figure it any way you want to."

Fleming's black, malignant eyes snapped impatiently.

Berman continued: "Listen. I tailed Ed Kirby after he parted company from Morengo the way I was supposed to. He must have got wise. Anyhow he cornered me down on Broadway and slapped me. God, how that guy can sock! I woke up in the station house charged with attempted robbery. Can you beat that? But Kirby didn't appear against me and the dicks let me go.

"This guy, here"—indicating Weatherby—"was standing close to the monitor desk when I was brought before the lieutenant's desk. As soon as I was on the sidewalk I spotted him tailing me. I slugged him down below. It was the only thing I could do. Well?"

Fleming's eyes shifted to Weatherby. "Where do *you* fit in?"

Weatherby tried to wipe the caked blood from his cheeks. "That heel's nuts," he scoffed. "I wasn't following him. And I wasn't near or in no station house. I was looking for a car."

"What kind of car?"

"A new one. These guys who go to places like the Golden Mirror are just saps enough to leave the switch keys inside. That's the kind of a car I was looking for. An easy one."

"Who you working for?"

"Ask me something else. You think I want my head shot off?"

"Wise and tough, eh?" sneered Fleming. "Maybe after a little working over you won't be so tough." He motioned to Berman. "Lock him up in the corner room. We'll check his story later."

Berman's automatic jammed against Weatherby's ribs. "Start walking, wise guy, towards that second door to your left and open it carefully. You're in a jam in case you don't know it, and it's going to take a lot of explaining to get out of it."

After a few minutes Berman re-

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turned, sheathing his automatic as he entered the room. "What do you think about that guy?" He indicated with a pointed thumb the room where Weatherby was being held a prisoner.

The fingers of the deformed man drummed thoughtfully on the top of his desk. "I don't know what to think. The punk may be telling the truth. I can't figure him. On the other hand, he may have tailed you as you left the station because somebody ordered him to. That's what we'll have to find out."

Berman paced the floor with nervous tread. He looked worried. "Where's Harry?" he wanted to know.

The shoulders of the deformed man hunched in a shrug. His hairless head settled down between twisted shoulder blades. "I don't know. He hasn't got back yet, and he hasn't phoned in." He pawed for a moment at a loose button on his coat sleeve, then snapped: "Sit down! You make me nervous walking up and down the carpet. Harry'll phone in the first chance he gets. You've got nothing to worry about. Your alibi is perfect. You were in a precinct station."

AT midnight Leon opened the hall door to admit the man in the gray suit, and closed it behind him, guarding it with his back.

Fleming's eyes raised questioningly. "Where the devil you been keeping yourself, Harry? And don't tell me the cops picked you up like they did Berman."

Harry's voice was low and strained. His eyes were still shot with harsh glints. "Give me a drink. And take one yourself, Fleming. You're going to need it."

From a cabinet beside his desk Fleming took out a bottle of old Scotch and some glasses. He set them on the desk. They all took a drink. Harry gulped a second for a chaser. He was breathing swiftly, jerkily.

"Talk, man!" rasped Fleming, sensing that something had gone wrong.

Harry wiped his lips with the back of his hand. "I saw everything that happened when this new rod-man, Ed Kirby, met Detective Rawlings under the elevated. Kirby was standing behind one of the pillars as the dick stepped from the curb. He eased around till he stood in front of the dick. Then his gun started to make a hell of a noise.

"Rawlings yanked out a police positive and turned a few slugs loose that bounced all over the ironwork. Then he sort of grunts and takes a flop to the pavement."

The gash in Fleming's mouth twisted into something meant for a smile. "Well," he sighed. "It looks like Ed Kirby has two grand due him. We'll have to pay him off right away."

Harry set the glass down on the desk. "Keep the two grand till you hear the rest of what I got to spill. Now listen. Along comes a radio car. It must have been spotted up the avenue to get there so quick. Even the follow-up ambulance showed up right behind it. Clockwork. It was too pretty a set-up. D'yuh see?"

Fleming gestured impatiently. Harry went on with his story:

"After things quieted down I went over to where Rawlings' body had rested on the pavement. You know how blood is. It turns black damn quick. The stuff I saw was still red. I knelt down and found the end of one of those tubes a chemist uses. There was still a little of the color inside the curve of the glass. I tasted it. It was bitter. Blood is salty. This stuff was like gall. Get it? Jim Rawlings was

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never shot. He faked death when he wasn't even scratched and tried to make it real with this red stuff in the glass tube."

Berman's face went white. He sat down and poured himself another drink.

For several moments Fleming said nothing. But his eyes had narrowed, and the gash that was his mouth started twitching. He returned the package of money to the drawer. Finally he spoke:

"Are you sure of all this, Harry?"

"Damn right I'm sure. The whole set-up was a phony. Now listen. The ambulance came from Bellevue. So I went there to do a little checking. Finally I got the lowdown from one of the internes who was in on the deal, and it cost me plenty to bribe him into talking. But in the end he spilled everything. There not a damn thing the matter with Detective Rawlings. He's in a private ward at Bellevue."

The deformed man ran the tip of his forefinger along the gash that was his mouth. His tunnel-black eyes seemed to stare into far space as if he was looking into the future. And he didn't seem happy at what he saw.

"We'll have to move fast, Harry. This fellow Kirby fooled me completely. He got the edge on me by that stunt he pulled when he cracked those two cops over the head and sprung Morengo."

"Hell!" granted Harry. "This Kirby is a cop himself . . . "

"Wait, Harry," counseled Fleming, speaking in a flat voice. "We mustn't make any mistakes. This business goes deeper than a play by the metropolitan police. There is something sinister about it that makes me wonder. Kirby is a blond. A big man, hard and cold as ice, quick on the draw and wise."

"You mean," croaked Harry, sucking in a deep breath, "that Kirby . . ."

"He's had his hair bleached," Fleming went on. "It was brown. Now it's light. And he's posing as a working man. He took a leaf out of Morengo's book. Listen, the both of you. Ed Kirby is the missing G-man down on our list for a bump-off. He's Nelson Grant. He must be!"

Harry began to dribble curses as he paced the floor.

"Swearing won't help matters," snarled Fleming. He hunched his twisted shoulders, and it made him look like a gnome behind the desk—a gnome with all the evilness of a Satan. "I've never seen Nelson Grant," he went on. "None of us have. He always kept himself in the background. Very little publicity. But he was always in the forefront when the Department made a raid. Bullets have never reached him. They say he can't be killed."

The last statement seemed to amuse him. The gash above his chin twisted cruelly. Out of it came an almost inhuman sound. Fleming was laughing, harshly, bestially. Suddenly he stopped. His eyes became brooding wells of sheer malignance. His hairless head dropped forward. He cupped his forehead in the palms of his hands and seemed to barter his warped soul to Satan as bait for Ed Kirby's sudden and horrible death. And the Devil laughed! For that soul was already doomed.

Fleming straightened. He took the receiver from the hook and called the tunnel construction company. To the voice that answered the call he asked: "May I speak with Mr. Morengo?"

The person at the other end obliged by calling the timekeeper to the phone. Fleming's voice was crisp. "Dip," he said, "did Kirby show up for work?

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Oh, he did. Good. And he's working in the caisson? Now listen. Any chance of being listened-in on? All right. Here's what I want you to do. If you fail me—it will be the last thing you'll ever do. Remember that. Kirby is not what we thought he was. He's a sneaking, double-crossing agent of the heat-squad . . ."

CHAPTER VI

Resurrection

STRIPPED to nothing but pants and shoes, Ed Kirby was, along with other torch men, still cutting away at the steel wall of the caisson. The circle through which the cutting shield was to drive through on its trip beneath the river was gradually taking shape. Great chunks of the metal had been cut away, and heavy planks braced against the sand and water that constantly menaced the lives of the men in the working chamber.

Only the powerful air pressure maintained by the compressors on the street level kept that sand and water back. Forty pounds of it swirled through pipes into the space below the steel deck of the caisson and pressed against every square inch of space.

The pressure caused the air to swirl in eddies like fog, and was almost as concealing. The temperature was high—always high, coming close to a hundred and forty degrees. An hour under such conditions was enough for the toughest of men.

But Ed Kirby was immune to the discomfort. He was willing to go through with anything in order to reach his goal—the destruction of the racketeer murder-ring.

Only vaguely was he conscious of the ghostly figure of fellow-workers, the hiss of air, the clank of hammers, and the sharp crackling of acetylene flames biting into hard steel.

His hour shift was nearly up. Then five hours of rest. During that five hours he must move and act swiftly. He must keep on playing the part until he found out more about the murder-ring. He believed he had evidence enough. But he wanted to obtain more. He knew that by tomorrow he would be in a position to get it if . . .

His mind suddenly went slack. He was conscious of something that didn't seem quite right. He snapped off the flame of his torch and turned around slowly. The sand hogs had quit their work. Every man present in the underground chamber had the same thought in his mind as had Kirby: "What had happened to the air pressure?"

For several strained moments there was a silence of dull uncertainty as minds groped with the impending tragedy. Ed Kirby broke it. His body splashed through the hot water on the floor bottom as he raced towards the field telephone hanging to the caisson wall. He rattled the receiver hook impatiently. No answer. The line was dead.

A shift superintendent appeared out of nowhere. "Pressure's going down fast," he stated, calmly. "What's the matter with the phone?"

"Dead," said Kirby.

Men came crowding over to where Kirby and the superintendent stood. Anxiety and fear were revealed in their mud-streaked faces at something they did not yet want to believe. One of them rushed over to what looked like a long, metal chimney stretching up to the sky. This was the man-lock used for entering and leaving the pressure chamber.

Kirby heard him scramble up the metal rungs and hammer on the closed

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door at the bottom of the compression lock above his head and shoulders.

"Water's coming up!" choked a second voice. "It's gurgling past the cracks in the planks. Some of them are beginning to bend inward already."

Kirby and the superintendent stumbled forward. The water was indeed rising. With air cut off from its source above, and becoming steadily weaker in the working chamber beneath the caisson, the enormous pressure from the river was beginning to get in its deadly work. And there was nothing they could do. These men were trapped.

Kirby's lips curled. He could hear the braced timbers cracking and groaning from the strain. How long could they stand it? Nothing but thick concrete or steel could hold back the mighty pressure of the river bearing down on the puny planks. They'd snap like matches.

Mud-covered sand hogs floundered through the water towards the safety of the chimney leading to the man-lock above. But this would be a hopeless place once the river started to pour in. Higher and higher lifted the water, driving human beings towards the false security of the chimney.

Air was whistling through the planks. Sand was already beginning to blow through. Once the first plank gave way the whole structure would collapse into an avalanche—a flood. Kirby kept away from the milling bodies.

He wasn't afraid of death. Too many times had he faced it, felt its fetid breath, and stood in its awful shadow. But to die without being able to fight against it was like tasting the bitter gall of failure. He clenched his hands. Water was surging around his hips, his chest, his neck—then the silence of the death tomb was abruptly shattered by the hiss of air as it poured into the working chamber of the caisson. The flood was momentarily checked.

THERE was a quivering tenseness about Ed Kirby's lips, and dark shadows in his eyes when he emerged from the decompression lock on the street level. Stevens was waiting for him. "You all right?" he asked, huskily.

Ed nodded. "Tell me. How'd it happen?"

"Morengo. I was watching him, but I didn't get on to what he was up to. I don't know much about tunnel workings. He went into that little place over there," indicating a housing built around the air compressors. "The engines were making so much noise I couldn't hear a thing. But I saw him come out soon afterwards, look around to see if anyone was watching him, then hurry out through the gate to the street. I watched him disappear, then decided to investigate.

"I found the mechanic in charge of the compressors lying on the floor. He had been struck on the head with a pipe wrench. I poured a bucket of water over his face and he roused up long enough to tell me what to do. I opened the air valves leading to the caisson like he told me to, but I couldn't do anything about the smashed telephone. Then I called in one of the superintendents."

Ed Kirby lit a cigarette. The smoke cleared his head and made him feel better. One thing was certain, Morengo had attempted to kill him at the sacrifice of many other human beings by cutting off the air pressure in the working chamber of the caisson. Clearly, Morengo must have been forced to do this by someone else—the Big Guy—Fleming.

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Something had gone wrong. Somewhere along the line Kirby knew that he had made an error. Where? Had Weatherby been captured? Had the deformed murder chieftain outguessed and outthought him from the very beginning? Ed Kirby would have given a lot to have known the answers to these troubled questions. He turned to the young agent beside him.

"Stevens," he said. "If you hadn't turned on those valves when you did I'd have been a bloated corpse by now." He sighed. "Well, Morengo's got a good start on us. And my guess is that he'll be at that address Grant phones in to the chief. And that's the hot spot we're going to visit—before dawn!"

Stevens felt for the gun beneath his armpit. "You want me to phone headquarters for additional men?"

"I don't know," mused Kirby, thoughtfully, "how close we are to the showdown with this murder-ring. Weatherby might be in a jam. I won't know for sure until I phone the chief to find out if he's made a report. Then there's Grant to keep in mind. I think I'll figure our move after I've talked with the chief. That's the best way."

FLEMING'S black, malignant eyes glared at the hard faces of the three gunmen in front of his desk. "What am I going to do?" he flung at them. "What do you suppose? I'm going to sit tight. Nothing's going to happen. This punk in the back room is out. We can play safe by planting a bullet through his head."

He pounded the desk with the palms of his hands. "The early morning papers will be out soon—extras. We'll know for certain then about both Rawlings and Kirby." He centered his gaze on Morengo. "Dip, are you sure you fixed Kirby for keeps?"

Morengo's smile was sickly. "Kirby and everybody else that was in the chamber beneath the caisson."

"Do you see?" explained Fleming, turning to the other men. "Kirby was alone in this—Kirby or Grant, whoever he is. With him wiped out, we've got nothing to worry about. Take a drink and forget about it."

A buzzer beneath his desk caused him to inhale sharply. He waited a few seconds before taking down the receiver of a special telephone whose wires led to a spot close to the elevator in the hall below. His face went green as he listened. Beads of sweat popped out on his hairless head. His voice, when he spoke into the mouthpiece, rasped like a dull file on steel.

"Bring him up, Leon," he said, thinly, "and keep him covered." He slammed the receiver to the hook and glared once more at the ring of taut faces in front of his own. "The dead comes to life," he told these faces. "Kirby, alive and well, is on the way up."

Berman and Harry both reached for their guns. Morengo slunk against the wall, his jaw aslack.

"You men let me do the talking," ordered the deformed man. "And take it easy. I'll give you the cue when to start shooting. Keep your guns out of sight. He's in the hall outside—now!"

THROUGH the hall door came Ed Kirby, arrogant and swaggering in every move he made. His felt hat was pushed back well above his forehead. On his face was something that might be misunderstood as a smile. Leon was close behind him, hands in the side pockets of his coat.

Harry and Berman moved out towards the center of the room. The door clicked shut. Leon now had his

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back against it. Off to one side, Dip Morengo, his eyes slitted to cover the inner confusion of his mind, crouched close to the light switch.

Ed Kirby placed both hands on his hips. "'Lo, everybody. Why so tense?" His eyes stabbed from one man to another and stopped when they sighted Berman. Recognition lighten them. "We meet again, fellow. Didn't know who you were or I wouldn't have been so rough. Honest, I thought you were a snooping dick."

His eyes swerved to where Fleming sat hunched behind his desk. "How's things by you, Boss? You don't look happy at seeing me. Thought I couldn't find this dump, eh? Brought me here with blinders on my eyes. Hell, it was a cinch. Had a little accident at the tunnel tonight. I almost croaked. So I quit. Went out to the street and damned if I didn't fall in with the taxi driver that Morengo hired when he came here after the—the little accident."

No one spoke. So Kirby continued: "That's the way it was. Well, aren't you muggs glad to see me here, safe? You don't act it. You act like you was scared of me—or something." His voice became suddenly harsh. "What's eating you—all of you?"

Fleming spoke for the first time. "I'm glad you came, Ed."

"Well, you don't look it. Not welching on the two grand, are you?"

"No, Kirby, I never welch—not if my men play straight with me."

"You mean—say, what the hell's wrong?"

"Everything. Rawlings isn't dead. He's in a private ward at Bellevue. Nice little show you put on down at Third Avenue. Only it didn't jell, Kirby."

Ed's eyebrows moved up. "Now ain't that nice?"

"Not for you—Special Operator Nelson Grant."

"Oh, hell!" spat Kirby. "You guys have got the jitters. Me, Nelson Grant?" He exhaled sharply. "That calls for a drink. Mind?" he asked, reaching for the Scotch.

He poured a tumbler half full and drank it neat. "I knew there was a catch in this somewheres," he went on, setting down the glass. "I've been gypped on the pay-off before. But the guys that gypped me never had any fun spending the money they held out. I'm that way, Fleming. Thought you'd better know."

The tunnel-black eyes of Fleming were veiled. He took a package of currency from a desk drawer and tossed it to Kirby. "Take it."

Ed caught it and tucked it inside his pocket. "Fair enough," he said. "What's next?"

Fleming turned to Berman. "Bring in that punk you found prowling down below." Weatherby was brought in.

Ed Kirby never batted an eye. He had a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach, but he showed no signs of it.

The voice of the deformed man crackled like a machine gun. "Harry, you and Berman keep your rods on this guy who calls himself Ed Kirby. Leon, get yourself ready. All right, mister," speaking to young Weatherby. "I'm going to ask you a few questions. And you're going to have the right answers ready."

Leon sauntered over to Weatherby's side.

Twisting around in his chair, Fleming spoke first to Kirby. "Ever see this wise guy before?"

The lips of Ed Kirby scarcely moved. "Never."

"Smack the kid down," rasped Fleming.

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Leon's bludgeoning fist crashed against the young agent's face. Weatherby staggered against the wall, pain twitching his features.

"Smack him again," Fleming ordered.

Leon complied. Weatherby sagged against the wall, his will unbroken.

"Talk!" raged Fleming, glaring at the defiant youngster. "You know this guy Kirby. You work for him. He had you tail one of my men. Come clean!"

Weatherby smiled contemptuously. "I don't know him, I tell you. Never saw him in my life. I—"

Again Leon struck, first with a right then a left. Weatherby's head snapped. His left eye started to puff and go closed. Ed Kirby remained motionless, his face a rigid mask.

"You aren't so smart as I thought you were, Fleming. This beating up a kid won't get you nowheres. Hell, you think I'm Nelson Grant. Prove it. Then turn your guns on me if you've got the guts."

There was an interruption in the hall. A drunk was outside—singing and mumbling to himself as his body swayed from one wall to the other. They heard him fumble at the knob. Then the door opened.

Monty, the playboy souse, in a wrinkled dress suit, stood smirking in the opening. "You gentlemen are having a party and left Monty out. Hi, Joe. Come a running. Whisky all around. Bring in a bottle! Bring in a case!"

"Get out!" snapped Fleming. "Harry, get this crazy man . . ."

Joe Wyman appeared in the hall. "Come on, Monty," he soothed. "This ain't any place for you. This is a business conference. Come on back into the club. This ain't *my* place."

"Any place suits me, Joe," hiccuped Monty. "Pour the drinks, somebody. Let's get going. Fix up the boys in the back room. Joe, where's all your waiters?"

Wyman grabbed his wandering customer by the shoulders and swung him around. Monty let out a whoop and pinned Joe's arms to his side. In the resulting confusion their entangled bodies collided with those of the gunmen, Harry and Berman, throwing them off balance.

ED KIRBY'S voice cut like a whiplash through the room. He was braced against the wall—a gun in each hand. "Stick 'em up, everybody. This is a pinch!"

Leon's gun was the first to crack from the side pocket of his coat. Burning cloth settled to the floor, smouldered for a second, then went out. A bullet smacked the wall close to Kirby's head.

Harry lunged free from the struggling bodies of Monty and Joe Wyman and hauled out a slim-barreled Webley. Monty, no longer the easy-going drunk, swung hard on Harry's jaw, knocking the gunman against the wall. Berman was on his knees, a stubby automatic in his right fist. Not a single hand went up that didn't clutch a gun—and those weapons all started to erupt at once.

The blast that thundered in the enclosed space was terrific during that first moment. Ed Kirby, his eyes half closed, had his shoulders to the wall so that no one could get behind him. He sent a bullet into Harry's leg and the gunman fell sideways.

A bullet knicked Kirby's left shoulder. It was as though someone had sliced out the flesh with a white-hot knife blade. It stung but did not cripple. He dropped to one knee just as Morengo snapped the light switch, plunging the room into blackness.

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Intermittent stabs of orange flame criss-crossed each other. Lights flashed on again as Weatherby reached the switch and clicked it on. Morengo tried to reach it a second time. Weatherby jumped him. They tangled and went to the floor in a writhing heap.

Kirby, kneeling by the wall, called out again: "You muggs had your chance. Now take it!" His gun fanned in a slow arc, spitting out death. Leon cried out and fell sprawling close to the hall door. Harry, rearing up like a striking snake from the floor, took careful aim at Ed Kirby's chest.

Monty kicked him in the wrist, sending the gun skittering across the carpet. Berman choked, and collapsed grotesquely. Then all was quiet except for the slobbering intake of men breathing.

Crossing the room to pick up Harry's automatic, Monty was checked by a voice with a metallic ring.

"Leave it alone!" The voice was Fleming's.

The thing happened so quickly that Ed Kirby was taken completely off guard. The front and one side of the deformed murder chieftain's desk dropped down.

One moment Fleming was seated behind his desk contemplating the carnage before his eyes. The next, he was crouched behind a sub-caliber Thompson machine gun capable of firing three hundred .45 caliber bullets a minute. There was a Cutts compensator attached to the gun's muzzle to lessen its tendency to lift and fire high.

As the first stuttering chatter burst from the machine gun, Ed Kirby flung himself to the floor. Monty and Weatherby jumped to escape the heat so suddenly and violently turned on.

Kirby fired at the deformed man's bald head and missed. The Thompson barrel swung towards his prone body. He reared up. The door leading to the hall opened suddenly and knocked him flat. Stevens, with two cops, crowded through the opening and collapsed in a pulsing heap of flesh.

Stevens' limp fingers dropped a pear-shaped object. Ed grabbed it. Aimed and flung it for the spot on the wall behind the chattering gun. Two bullets lanced the flesh of his upflung arm. Crabwise, he crawled to Leon's curled-up body. As he crouched behind it, leaden slugs tore off chunks of his clothing.

He flattened his head and shoulders till his face dug into the carpet. He could feel Leon's body trembling with the shock of thudding bullets. A sharp, rancid odor stung Ed's eyes and nose —fumes from the tear gas bomb. Then the machine gun stopped abruptly.

Ed reared up a second time. He could hear Fleming coughing and see him rubbing his eyes into the sleeve of his coat. He raised his gun, saw Monty leaping towards the death instrument, then heard a muffled thud as a gun butt lashed the deformed man's skull.

He got up. One hand was useless, but the other still froze to a heavy automatic. His eyes were almost blinded from the fumes of the gas bomb. He went reeling across the room opening doors and the windows in the rooms beyond these doors. Then he came back to where Monty was wiping his eyes on a silk handkerchief.

He grabbed him by the arm and spoke softly, "You staying for explanations, Nels?"

Nelson Grant shook his head. "You're in charge, Ed. I want to keep out of it. I'm still Monty to a lot of big and little shots in this town. Chicago's next in line for a crack down. Play the game. I'm fading."

He stepped over the bodies of men

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near the door and vanished down the stairs leading to the bar of the Golden Mirror. The elevator door clanged in the hall outside and suddenly the room was filled with cops and special agents.

Ed Kirby sat down and poured himself a drink. His eyes blinked as he watched other men sort over the living from the dead, then strayed with curious detachment to the crimson stream darkening the back of his hand.

"But I'm still alive," he thought. "Still alive till the next showdown. And the next—and the next . . .!" A slow smile spread over his tense face. He wouldn't have had it otherwise. For Ed Kirby belonged to that breed of men who go down fighting for law and order. Let the Devil laugh. Ed Kirby could also laugh, and did, too, as he lunged to his feet and began to snap out orders.

The Clue of the Handkerchief

THE nostrils, next to the hair, are very efficient dust traps. They contain a fine coating of hair designed specifically to trap dust particles and prevent it from entering the lungs.

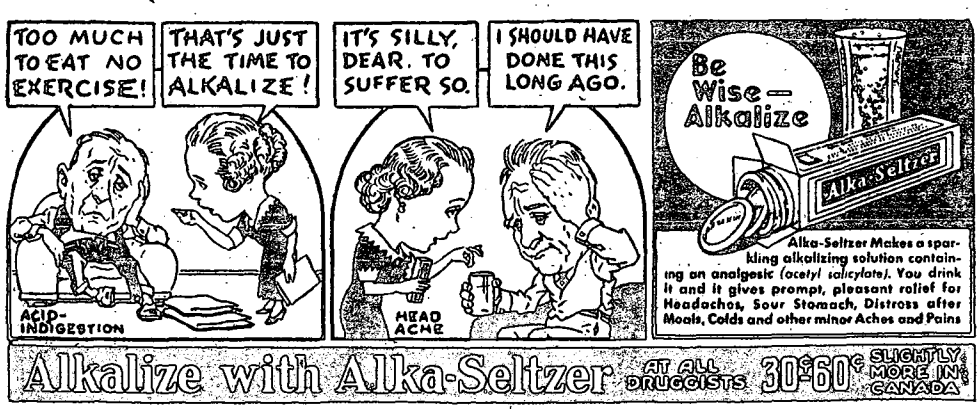
The great predecessor of Dr. Locard was Dr. Hans Gross, who also knew how to read dust. A woman was found murdered, and the only clue was a handkerchief picked up near the body. There was nothing out of the ordinary about the handkerchief, but the detective who picked it up brought it to Dr. Gross for examination.

The dust expert examined the piece of linen carefully, and noted some particles of blackish dust in the dried mucus. A careful examination under the microscope revealed them to be a particular brand of snuff.

This was a vital clue. The killer was a snuff-taker. The search further narrowed down to a snuff-taker of the particular kind of snuff found on the handkerchief.

Detectives made a thorough search of the tobacconists in the vicinity of the murder and from one they learned of a man who was an inveterate user of the brand of snuff found on the handkerchief. The man was apprehended and after a bit of persuasion confessed to the murder.

—*Edward Podolsky.*


TOO MUCH TO EAT NO EXERCISE!
THAT'S JUST THE TIME TO ALKALIZE!
ACID-INDIGESTION
IT'S SILLY, DEAR. TO SUFFER SO.
I SHOULD HAVE DONE THIS LONG AGO.
HEAD ACHE
Be Wise— Alkalize
Alka-Seltzer
Alka-Seltzer Makes a sparkling alkalizing solution containing an analgesic (acetyl salicylate). You drink it and it gives prompt, pleasant relief for Headaches, Sour Stomach, Distress after Meals, Colds and other minor Aches and Pains
Alkalize with Alka-Seltzer
AT ALL DRUGGISTS 30¢-60¢
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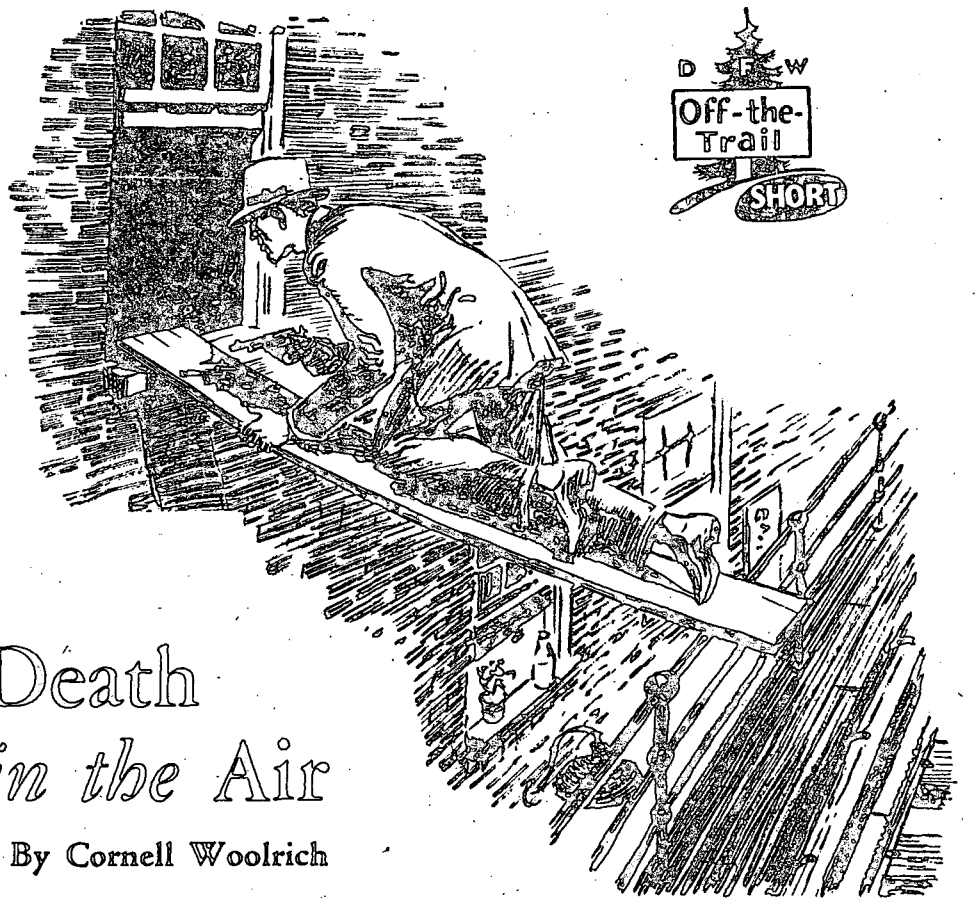

A minute later he was groveling across the plank in mid-air

Death *in the Air*

By Cornell Woolrich

INSPECTOR STEPHEN LIVELY, off-duty and homeward-bound, stopped at the newsstand underneath the stairs leading up to the Elevated station and selected one of the following day's newspapers and one of the following month's magazines for purposes of relaxation. His nightly trip was not only lengthy, it was in two parts — from headquarters to South Ferry by "El" and from there to Staten Island by ferry—hence the two separate items of reading-matter; one for each leg of the way.

Given a combination of two such names as his and, human nature being what it is, what else can you expect in the way of a nickname but — Step Lively? It had started at the age of seven or thereabouts when he stood up in school and pronounced his first name the wrong way; he finally quit

Inspector Lively Walked Slowly and Talked Slowly— but He Thought Fast, and That's What Pays Dividends on a Fiend's Murder-Trail!

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struggling against it when it followed him onto the squad and he realized that he was stuck with it for the rest of his days, like it or not.

It wouldn't have been so bad, only it was altogether inappropriate. Step Lively had never made a quick motion in his life. To watch him was to think of an eight-times-slowed-down film or a deep-sea diver wading through seaweed on the ocean floor; he gave the impression of having been born lazy and getting more so all the time. And the nickname probably made this trait more glaring.

He was not, strangely enough, obese along with it—just the opposite, tall and spare, concave at the waist where others bulge. He carried his head habitually bent forward a little, as though it were too much trouble to hold it up straight. He not only walked slowly, he even talked slowly. What mattered chiefly was that he thought fast; as far as results went, his record on the force seemed to prove that the race isn't always to the swift. He'd been known to bring in some of the nimblest, most light-footed gentry on record.

Like a steam-roller pursuing a motorcycle; it can't keep up with it, but it can keep remorselessly after it, wear it down, slowly overtake it, and finally flatten it out. So Step's superiors didn't let it worry them too much that he was the despair of traffic-cops crossing a busy street, or that he sent people waiting on line behind him out of their minds. It takes more than that to spoil a good detective.

Step entered the lighted stairway-shed and sighed at the sight of the climb that awaited him, as it did every night. An escalator, like some of the other stations had, would have been so much easier on a man.

The subway, which would have gotten him to the ferry considerably quicker, he eschewed for two very good reasons. One was that he'd have to walk a whole additional block eastward to get to it. And secondly, even though you descended to it instead of climbing at this end, you had to climb up out of it at the other end anyway; he preferred to get the hard work over with at the start, and have a nice restful climb down waiting for him when he got off.

He slowly poised one large, paddle-like foot on the bottom step and eight minutes later he was upstairs on the platform, the ordeal of the ascent safely behind him until tomorrow night. As he stepped out from behind the turnstile, a Sixth Avenue train was standing by with its gates in the act of closing. Step could have made it; a man who had come up behind him darted across and did. Step preferred not to. It would have meant hurrying. There'd be another one along in a minute. The old adage about cars and women was good common horse-sense.

This was 59th, and the trains alternated. The next would be a Ninth Avenue. They separated at 53rd, but both wound up together again at South Ferry, so it didn't matter which he took. More seats on the Ninth anyway. And so, because he refused to bestir himself—this story.

A three-car Ninth flashed in in due course. Step got up off the bench—it wouldn't have been like him to stand waiting—and leisurely strolled across to it. He yawned and tapped his mouth as he perambulated sluggishly down the aisle. The crabby, walrus-mustached conductor, who had had to hold the gate for him, felt a sudden

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unaccountable urge to stick a pin in him and see if he really could move fast or not, but wisely restrained the impulse, maybe because he had no pin.

The first car had a single occupant, sitting on one of the lengthwise seats, visible only up to the waist. The rest of him was buried behind an outspread newspaper, expanded to its full length. Step sprawled out directly opposite him, with a grunt of satisfaction, opened his own paper, and got busy relaxing. All the windows were open on both sides of the car, and it was a pleasant, airy way to ride home on a warm night. Two pairs of legs and two tents of newsprint on opposite sides of the aisle were all that remained visible. The conductor, maybe because Step irritated him vaguely, retired to the second car, between stations, instead of this one.

THE train coasted down Ninth Avenue sixty feet in the air, with the buildings that topped it by a story or two set back at a respectable distance from its roadbed. But then at Twelfth Street, it veered off into Greenwich Street and a change in spacing took place. The old mangy tenements closed in on it on both sides, narrowing into a bottleneck and all but scraping the sides of the cars as they threaded through them. There was, at the most, a distance of three yards between the outer rail of the superstructure and their fourth-floor window-ledges, and where fire-escapes protruded only half that much.

What saved them from incessant burglarizing in this way was simply that there was nothing to burglarize. They were not worth going after. Four out of five were tenantless, windows either boarded up or broken-glass cavities yawning at the night. Occasionally a dimly-lighted one floated by, so close it gave those on the train a startling impression of being right in the same room with those whose privacy they were cutting across in this way. A man in his underwear reading a paper by a lamp, a woman bent over a washtub in a steaming kitchen. Their heads never turned at the streaming, comet-like lights or the roar of the wheels going by. They were so used to it they never gave it a thought. It was just part of their surroundings. Nor did those on the train show any interest either, as a rule. The few there were at this hour had their papers up and their backs to the passing scene. There isn't anything pretty about lower West Side of New York. The river a block over is blotted out by docks, and the connecting side-streets are roofed with produce-sheds.

In the front car, the two solitary occupants continued immersed in their reading-matter. Christopher and Houston had gone by, and they pulled into Desbrosses Street. As they cleared it again a moment later, the train slackened briefly, slowed down without coming to a full halt, then almost immediately picked up speed once more. Perhaps some slight hitch on the part of a track-signal or a momentary break in the "shoe" gripping the third rail. Step took his eyes off his paper and glanced around over his shoulder, not because of that, but to find out how near his destination he was.

There was an open window staring him in the face, flush with the car-window that framed him, and so close it was almost like a continuation of it, a connecting-tunnel into the tenement's front room. There was no light in the first room, but light shone feebly in from the room beyond through an open

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doorway. At the same time the train-lights swept in and washed across the walls like a sort of lantern-slide, from left to right.

In the double glare, fore and aft, two forms could be glimpsed, moving unsteadily about together. A man and woman dancing drunkenly in the dark, with exaggerated motions of their arms and heads. Lurching, reeling, pressed tightly together. "Wonder what the big idea of that is?" Step thought tolerantly. "Too warm for lights, I guess—" The noise of the cars drowned out whatever music was being supplied them for their strange activities.

Just as the two superimposed windows slipped apart out of perspective, the wheels of the train cracked loudly as though passing over a defect in the rails. At the same time, one of the shadow-dancers struck a match and it went right out again, just a stab of orange, and some water-borne insect or other winged into the car past Step's face. He slapped vaguely at it, went back to his newspaper. The train picked up speed and headed down the track for Franklin Street.

The party across the aisle had fallen asleep, Step noticed when next he glanced over across the top of his paper. He grinned broadly at the sight he presented. There was a man after his own heart. Too much trouble even to fold up his paper and put it away. The breeze coming in on Step's side of the car had slapped it back against his face and shoulders; his hands were no longer holding it up, had dropped limply to his lap. His legs had sprawled apart, were wobbling loosely in and out like rubber with the motion of the car.

Step wondered how he could breathe with the layers of paper flattened that way across his nose and mouth, you could actually see the indentation his nose made through it. And that insect that had blown in—it looked like a large black beetle—was perched there on the paper just above it. Step thought of the innumerable comedy-gags he'd seen where someone tried to swat a fly on a sleeper's face, and of course the sleeper got the full impact of it. If he only knew the guy, he'd be tempted to try that now himself. Still, it was an awful lot of effort to reach across a car-aisle just to swat a horse-fly.

As they began drawing up for Franklin, the air-current of their own momentum rushed ahead, outdistanced them. It tugged loose the outside page of the sleeper's outspread newspaper, no longer clamped down by his fingers, and sent it whirling up the aisle. Step blinked and went goggle-eyed. The black bug was still there, on the page underneath, as though it had bored its way through! A second sheet loosened, went skimming off. The damn thing was still there, as though it were leaping invisibly from one page to the other!

STEP got to his feet, and though the motion was slow enough, there was a certain tenseness about him. He wasn't grinning any more. Just as he did so, the train came to a halt. The jolt threw the sleeper over on the side of his face, and all the rest of the newspaper went fluttering off, separating as it went. The black bug had leaped the last gap, was in the exact middle of the sleeper's forehead now, this time red-rimmed and with a thread of red leading down from it alongside his nose, like a weird eyeglass-string, to lose itself in the corner of his mouth. Step had seen too many of them not to know

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a bullet-hole when he saw one. The sleeper was dead. He didn't have to put his hand in under his coat, nor touch the splayed hand, caught under his body and dangling down over the aisle like a chicken-claw, to make sure of that. Death had leaped out at him from the very print he was reading. Such-and-such, then—period! A big black one, right into the brain. He'd never known what had hit him, had died instantly, sitting up. It wasn't the breeze that had slapped the paper up against him; it was the bullet. It wasn't an insect that had winged past Step's shoulder that time; it was the bullet.

Step reached up leisurely and tugged twice at the emergency-cord overhead. The gates had closed on Franklin, and the train had already made a false start ahead, checked immediately with a lurch. The handlebar-mustached conductor came running in from the platform, the motorman looked out from his booth at the upper end of the car.

"What's the idea? What's going on in here?" The conductor's words spattered like buckshot around the heedless Step.

"Hold the train," he drawled almost casually. "Here's a man been shot dead." Then as the blue-coated one began panting down the back of his neck and elbowing him aside, he remonstrated mildly, "Now don't crowd like that. There's nothing *you* can do. What y'getting so excited about? Just lemme try to find out who he is first—"

The motorman said from the other side of him, "Get him off. We can't stand here all night. We're on a schedule; we'll tie up the whole line into a knot behind us."

"Stand aside! Who do you think you are anyway?" the fiery conductor demanded.

Step said wearily, "Oh, do I have to go through that again?" and absent-mindedly palmed his badge to him, backhand, while he continued bending over the prostrate form. From then on there was nothing but a respectful silence all around while he went on going through the corpse's pockets with maddening deliberation.

His mind, however, was anything but sluggish, was crackling like a high-tension wire. The sound of the shot? There didn't necessarily have to be any in this case, but that crack of the car-wheels over a split in the rails had probably been it. And the match that one of those two tipsy dancers had struck in the darkened tenement-room back there hadn't been a match at all, hadn't glowed steadily enough nor lasted long enough, couldn't have been anything but the flash of the shot, the results of which he was now beholding.

Drinking, carousing, then entertaining themselves by taking pot-shots out the window at passing trains, were they? Well, a nice little manslaughter rap would take the high spirits out of them, for some time to come, whoever they were.

"Dudley Wall," he said, reading from an envelope. "Lives on Staten Island like me. Shame, poor fella. All right, take him by the feet and help me get him outside to the waiting-room." And as the conductor moved backwards before him down the aisle, with the body between them, he rebuked: "Don't walk so fast. He ain't going to get away from us!" They moved at a snail's pace thereafter, to suit Step, out through the gate and across the platform with their burden. Stretched him out on one of the benches inside by the change-booth, and then

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Step strolled inside with the agent and sent in his report over the latter's phone.

"That guy," whispered the conductor darkly to the motorman on their way back to their posts, "has sleeping sickness, you can't tell me different!"

"Maybe it's ringworm," hazarded the motorman. They pulled out, and the two or three other trains that had ganged up behind them flashed by one after the other without stopping, to make up for lost time.

"I gotta get back to Desbrosses Street," Step remarked, coming out again. "You keep an eye on him till they get here." He felt sure he'd know the tenement window again when he saw it, whether they were still there or not.

"Well, you'll have to go down to the street, cross over, and then climb to the uptown side," the agent explained, wondering what he was waiting for.

Step looked horrified. "And then when I get there climb down again? And climb up four flights of stairs inside that building? Oh, golly, I'm just tuckered out. I couldn't make it. I'll walk back along the track, only way I can see. That's bad enough."

HE sighed deeply, took a tuck in his belt, and made his way to the far end of the platform. He descended the short ladder to the track-level and struck out from there, trudging doggedly along with one hand trailing along beside him on the guard-rail.

"Watch the trains!" the agent shouted after him warningly.

Step didn't answer out loud, that was too much trouble, but to himself he muttered: "This is one time I'm glad I'm good and thin!"

One of them caught him halfway between the two stations, and the sight of it looming up on him was fairly terrifying to one unused to track-walking. He began to wobble unsteadily on the cat-walk, which seemed only inches wide, and realizing that he would either topple dizzily in front of it or fall down to the street if he kept looking at it head-on, he wisely turned his back to it, grabbed the guard-rail with both hands, and stared intently out at the roof-tops, ignoring it till it had hurtled by. Its velocity nearly seemed to pull the coat off his back.

He stared after it disapprovingly. "Such a town. Everything always in a hurry to get somewhere else!" Then he resumed his laborious progress alongside the tracks, feeling sorry for his feet and hoping the sniper in the tenement had no firearms license, so he could also tack a stiff Sullivan-Law charge on him.

The two lighted halves of the Desbrosses Street platform loomed toward him, lighted under the apron like the footlights of a stage. It ought to be about here. They'd already pulled out, he remembered, when he'd turned around to look. Dark-red brick it had been, but then the whole row was that. No fire-escape, either. Wait a minute, there'd been a sign up on the cornice of the building next-door, but on which side of it, he couldn't recall. Nor what it had said, until suddenly it was staring him in the face once more, with that vague familiarity that only twice-seen things can have. Then he knew that was it. PICKLED AND SALTED FISH in tarnished metal capitals with rain-streaks under them, each letter separately clamped to the brickwork, in the style of the nineteenth-century advertiser. He stopped in front of the building next to it, on the Des-

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brosses side. This had almost certainly been it. There was the same wide-open window through which he'd seen them dancing. But no light was coming in from the other room now. It was dark and deserted, just a gap in the façade.

It looked near enough to touch, but actually was far more inaccessible from where he now was, than it had seemed from the train-window. The gap was just wide enough to fall to your death in without half-trying, and the ledge was just over his head, now that he was down at track-level.

Step Lively had the courage of his convictions. He was going to get in this way, without going all the way down to the street and climbing up inside that dump, if he died in the attempt. He looked around him vaguely but determinedly. They had been repairing the track-bed near here somewhere, and there was a neat, handy little stack of short planks piled up, almost directly across the way from him — but with two third-rails in-between.

He didn't hesitate for a minute. What was a third rail compared to climbing four flights of stairs and getting all out of breath? Besides, they had guards on top of them, like covered troughs. There wasn't anything coming on this side, so he started across on one of the ties, and arched respectfully over the deadly metal when he came to it. So much for the downtown track. An uptown train was pulling out of Franklin, but it wouldn't get here for awhile yet. Plenty of time to get back and across.

He reached the opposite catwalk safely, picked up the top plank, and tucked it broadside under his arm. The on-coming train was still at a respectable distance, although its lights were getting brighter by the moment. He started back over, the plank swaying up and down in his grasp like a see-saw. It wasn't the actual weight of it that hampered him, it was that its length threw him off-balance. He was like a tightrope-walker with too long a pole. He didn't have it right in the middle, and it kept tipping him forward. The train was big as a barn by now, he hadn't calculated on how quickly it would cover the short distance between the two stations. You could already look right down the lighted aisle of the first car, through the open vestibule-door. But this was no time for surveying. He lifted one foot clear of the contact-rail, set it down on the other side, then tried to bring the second one over after it. It wouldn't come. He must have given it just the wrong kind of a little half-turn. It was stuck between the two ties.

He didn't do anything at all for just a split second, which is sometimes the wisest possible course — and came easiest to him, anyway. However, there weren't many of them left, split or otherwise. The roar of the train was rising to a crescendo. The first thing almost anyone else would have done in his fix would have been to yank and tug at the recalcitrant foot—and wedge it in irretrievably. Step Lively was a slow mover but a quick thinker. He used his split-second to turn his head and stare down one hip at the treacherous hoof. The heel had dipped down into the space between the two ties and jammed. It ought to come out again easy enough, if he did the right thing. And there wasn't time to do the wrong thing. So he started turning back again on it, as if he were going to step right in front of the train. That reversed whatever

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twist had originally trapped it; it came up free, smooth as pie, and he stepped backwards with it out of death's path, face turned toward the train as it rushed abreast of him, brakes that wouldn't have been in time to save him screeching. He had presence of mind enough to point the plank skyward, like a soldier presenting arms, so the train wouldn't sideswipe it and throw him. The cars seemed to take the skin off his nose.

THE damn thing stopped a car-length away, but whether on his account or the station's he didn't know and didn't bother finding out. He got back the rest of the way to the other side of the tracks on knees that made him ashamed of them, they jogged so.

"Now just for that," he growled unreasonably at the blank window, "I'm gonna slap you up plenty for attempting to escape while under arrest, or something!"

The plank, when he paid it out, bridged the gap neatly, but at rather a steep incline, the window-ledge being higher than the guard-rail of the "El" structure. The distance, however, was so short that this didn't worry him. He took the precaution of taking out his gun, to forestall any attempt to shake him off his perch before he could grab the window-sash, but so far there had been no sign of life from within the room. They were probably sleeping it off.

He got up on the bottom rail, put his knee on the plank, and a minute later was groveling across it in mid-air, above the short but very deep chasm. It slipped diagonally downward toward the "El" a little under his weight, but not enough to come off the ledge. The next minute he had his free hand hooked securely around the wooden window-frame and was over and in.

He took a deep breath of relief, but still wouldn't have been willing to admit that this was a lot of trouble to go to just to get out of climbing a flock of stairs. He was that way. Without looking down just now, he'd been dimly aware of people milling about on the street below him, shouting up. They'd taken him for crazy, he supposed.

A downtown train careened past just behind his back right then, and lighted up the interior of the room for him nicely, better than a pocket-flash. It also did something else—as though all these trains tonight bore him a personal grudge. It struck the lower edge of the plank he had just used, which extended too far in past the rail, with a crack and sent it hurtling down to the street below. As long as he hadn't been on it at the time, being cut off like this didn't worry him particularly—he'd intended walking down anyway. He only hoped those on the sidewalk would see it coming in time to dodge. They ought to, looking up the way they had been.

But before he could give it another thought, the flickering train-lights washing across the walls showed him that he wasn't alone in the room after all.

One-half of his quarry was lying there face-down across the bed. It was the lady-souse, and judging by the way her arms hung down on one side and her feet on the other she was more soused than ladylike. Step took his eye off her and followed the phantom yellow-square the last car-window made as it traveled around three of the walls after its mates and then flickered out in the opposite direction from the train. It had shown him a switch by

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the door. So the place was wired for electricity, decrepit as it was. There was a moment of complete darkness, and then he had the room-light on.

He turned back to her. "Hey, you!" he growled. "Where's that guy that was in here with you a couple minutes ago? Get up offa there and answer me before I—!"

But she wasn't answering anybody any more. The bullet-hole under her left eye answered for her, when he tilted her face. It said: *Finished!* The cheek was all pitted with powder-burns. There was a playing-card symbol, the crimson ace of diamonds, on the white counterpane where the wound had rested. His eye traveled around the room. No radio, nothing to make music. They hadn't been dancing. That had been her death-struggle in his arms. The first shot had missed her, had killed the man named Wall in the first car of the "El" instead; the second one must have come a split-second after Step's car-window passed beyond range. The same bullet hadn't killed both; hers was still in her head. There was no wound of egress.

Step didn't bother playing detective, snooping around, even examining the remaining rooms of the tawdry little flat. His technique would have astounded a layman, horrified a rookie, probably only have made his superior sigh resignedly and shrug. "Well, that's Step for you." What he did about getting after the culprit, in a murder that had been committed so recently it was still smoking, was to pull over a warped rocking-chair, sit down, and begin rolling a cigarette. His attitude implied that it had tired him plenty to walk the tracks all the way back here, and everything could wait until he'd rested up a little. An occasional flickering of the eyelids, however, betokened that all was not as quiet on the inside of his head as on the outside.

The woman's hands seemed to fascinate him. The tips of her fingers were touching the floor, as though she were trying to balance herself upside-down. He took them up in his own and looked more closely. The nails were polished and well cared for. He turned them palm-up. The skin was not coarse and reddened, by dishwashing and housework. "You didn't belong here on Greenwich Street," he remarked. "Wonder who you were hiding from?"

A LONG spike of ash had formed on the end of his cigarette, and crummy as the place was, he looked around for something to park it in. No ashtrays in sight; evidently the dead lady hadn't been a smoker. He flicked the ash off into space, and as he did so, his eyes traveled down the seam between two of the unpainted floor-boards. Wedged into it was a butt. He got it out with the aid of a pin from his lapel. The mouth-end was still damp. Her lips, he had noticed, had been reddened fairly recently. But there wasn't a fleck of color on this. Not hers, therefore.

He dropped the cigarette he had been smoking and crushed it out, then passed the other one back and forth under his nose a couple of times. An acrid odor immediately took the place of the aroma of his familiar Virginia tobacco. He went a step further, put a lighted match to the end of it and tried to draw on it without actually touching it to his lips, still holding it on the pin. He had to suck mightily to start it glowing. Instantly there were results. His lungs smarted. And

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yet it wasn't the smoke of the burning paper he was getting, as in the case of an ordinary cigarette. That was escaping at both ends. It was the vapor of the weed that filled it.

Marihuana—crazy-weed. And unwittingly he'd gone about just the right way of smoking it, not letting it come into contact with his lips. A vacuous, boisterous laugh wrenched from him abruptly, over the slain woman's head. Nothing to laugh at, and here he was roaring. He dropped the damned thing precipitately, trod on it as though it were a snake, opened his mouth and fanned pure air into it. The booming laugh subsided to a chortle, ebbed away. He mopped his forehead, got up, and went unsteadily toward the outer door of the flat.

The din down below in the street seemed to have increased a hundredfold, meanwhile; he couldn't be sure whether it actually had or it was just the after-effects of the drugged cigarette making it seem so. Sirens screeching, bells clanging, voices yelling—as though there were a whole crowd milling around out there.

He opened the flat door, and you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. No lights out in the hall. Then he saw a peculiar hazy blur just a few feet away, up overhead, and realized that there *were* lights—but the building was on fire. It wasn't darkness he'd stepped out into, but a solid wall of smoke.

He could possibly have gotten out, still made the street from where he was, by a quick dash down the stairs then and there. Step Lively plus several whiffs of a drugged cigarette, however, was no combination calculated to equal a quick dash in any direction, up or down. He turned around coughing and shuffled back into the flat he had just emerged from, closing the door on the inferno outside.

To do him justice, it wasn't simply inertia or laziness this time that kept him up there where he was. Hundreds of men in hundreds of fires have hung back to drag somebody living out with them. But very few have lingered to haul out somebody already dead. That, however, was precisely what Step had gone back for. The lady was his corpus delicti and he wasn't leaving her there to be cremated.

That a fire should start up here and now, in the very building where a murder had been committed, was too much of a coincidence. It was almost certainly a case of incendiarism on the murderer's part, perpetrated in hopes of obliterating all traces of his crime. "And if he was smoking that devilish butt I picked up," he said to himself, "he wouldn't stop to worry about whether anybody else was living in the building or not!"

He retrieved it a second time, what there was left of it, and dropped it in his pocket, pin and all. Then he wrapped the counterpane with the ace-of-diamonds symbol on it around the woman, turning her into a bundle of laundry, and moved toward the door with her. The current failed just as he was fumbling at it with one hand, under her, and the room went black.

A dull red glow shone up the stairwell, though, when he got it open. It would have been all right to see by, but there wasn't anything to breathe out there any more, just blistering heat and strangling smoke. Spearheads of yellow started to shoot up through it from below, like an army with bayonets marching up the stairs. He got back inside again, hacking and with water pouring out of his eyes, but hanging onto her like grim death, as though she

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were some dear one instead of just a murdered stranger he had happened to find.

The room was all obliterated with haze now, like the hallway had been the first time, but he groped his way through it to the window. He didn't lose his head; didn't even get frightened. That was all right for women or slobs in suspenders, trapped on the top floor of a blazing tenement. "I didn't come in through the door, anyway," he growled. He was good and sore, though, about all this hectic activity he was having to go through. "I should 'a' been home long ago, and had my shoes off—" he was thinking as he leaned out across the sill and tried to signal to the mob that he could hear, but no longer see, down on the street.

He was hidden from them, and they from him, by the smoke billowing out from the windows below him. It formed a regular blanket between—but not the kind that it paid to jump into. Still, the apparatus must be ganged up down there by this time. You'd think they'd do something about helping a fellow get down, whether they could see him or not. Somebody must have almost certainly spotted him climbing in. . . .

EVEN if he still had the plank, he couldn't have made it across on that any more. He not only had *her* now, but his lungs and eyes were going all wacky with this damn black stuff, he'd have toppled off it in a minute. The crack he'd just made to himself about having his shoes off at home registered. He parked her across the sill, bunched one leg, and started unlacing. It took him about forty-five seconds to undo the knot and slip the oxford off—which for him was excellent time. He poised it and flung it down through the smoke. If it would only bean somebody, now, they'd stop and think maybe that shoes don't come flying down out of a fire unless there's somebody up there in it alive.

It did. A section of ladder shot up out of the swirling murk just as it left his hand. The helmeted figure scampering up monkey-like met the shoe halfway, with the bridge of his nose, and nearly went off into space. He flailed wildly with one propeller-like arm, caught the ladder once more in the nick of time, and resumed his ascent—a brief nosebleed to add to his troubles. Such language Step had rarely heard before. "Oops," he murmured regretfully. "Shows it never pays to be too hasty. What I've always said."

The fireman wiped his mouth, growled: "C'mon, step out and over, the roof's gonna go any minute." He was on a level with Step's eyes now, outside the window. The room was about ready to burst with heat; you could hear the floor-boards cracking as they expanded.

Step reared the mummy-like figure, thrust it across the sill into the smoke-eater's arms. "Take this stiff and be careful of her," he coughed. "She's valuable. I'll be right down on top of you."

The fireman, hooked onto the ladder by his legs, slung the burden over his shoulder, clamped it fast with one arm, and started down. Step started to climb over the sill backwards. The smoke was worse out here than in the room, he couldn't see the ladder any more. A silvery lining to the smoke, like a halo all around him, showed they were training a searchlight up from below, but it couldn't get through the dense, boiling

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masses. He found a rung with his one stockinged foot, made passes at the air until he'd finally connected with one of the invisible shafts—and the rest was just a switch over. Try it sometime yourself.

Then he stayed where he was until he'd shrugged his coat half-off his shoulders and hooded it completely over his head. Then he went down slowly, blind, deaf, seared, and breathing into worsted a little at a time. He went down ten stories, twenty, fifty—and still the ground wouldn't come up and meet him. He decided the place must have been the Empire State in disguise. One time he passed through a spattering of cool, grateful spray blown off one of the hose-lines and almost felt like sticking around in it, it felt so good. Just about the time he decided that the ladder must be slowly moving upward under him, like a belt-line or treadmill, and that was why he wasn't getting anywhere, hands grabbed him at the ankles and shoulders and he was hoisted to terra firma a yard below.

"Bud," said the Fire Chief patiently, "as long as you were in shape to climb down on your own, couldn't you have made it a *little* faster? I'm a very nervous man."

Step disengaged his head from his coat, kissed himself on the knuckles, bent down and rapped them against the Greenwich Street sidewalk. Then he straightened up and remonstrated: "I never was rushed so in my life as I been for the past half-hour!" He glanced upward at the haze-blurred building, whose outline was beginning to emerge here and there from the haze of smoke.

"The fire," the Chief enlightened him, turning away, "was brought under control during the half-hour you were passing the third floor. We finally put it out during the, er, forty-five minutes it took you getting from there down. The assistant marshal's in there now conducting an investigation—" Which may have leaned more toward sarcasm than accuracy, but was a good example of the impression Step made upon people the very first time they encountered him.

"Tell him for me," Step said, "it was arson—nothing else but. He mayn't be able to find any evidence, but that doesn't alter the fact any."

"A firebug, you think?"

"Something just a step worse. A murderer. A pyromaniac is irresponsible, afflicted, can't help himself. This dog knew just what he was doing, killed his conscience for both acts ahead of time with marihuana." He pointed to the muffled figure on the stretcher. "That woman was shot dead a good quarter of an hour before the fire was discovered. I was a witness to it. I'm Lively, of the —th Precinct, uptown."

The fire chief muttered something that sounded like: "You may be attached to that precinct, but you're not lively." But he was diplomatic enough to keep it blurred. "But if you were a witness," he said aloud, "how is it the guy—?"

"Powdered? I wasn't in the room with them, I glimpsed it from an 'El' train that stalled for a minute opposite the window! You go in there and tell your marshal not to bother looking for gasoline cans or oil-soaked rags. He didn't have time for a set-up like that, must have just put a match to a newspaper running down the s.t.a.i.r.s. Where's the caretaker or janitor, or didn't the dump have one?"

"Over behind the ropes there, in the crowd across the street. Take him

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over and point out the guy to him, Marty."

STEP trailed the fireman whom he had clouted with his shoe—which incidentally had vanished—limping on his one unshod foot, and ducked under the rope beside a grizzled, perspiring little man. Palmed his badge at him to add to his terror, and asked, while his eyes roved the crowd that hemmed them in: "Who was the woman top-floor front?"

"Insoorance?" whined the terrified one.

"No, police department. Well, come on—"

"Smiff. Miss Smiff."

Step groaned. But he'd figured she'd been hiding out anyway, so it didn't really matter much. "How long she been living up there in your house?"

"Ten day."

"Who visited her, see anybody?"

"Nome-body. She done even go out; my wife bring food."

Good and scared, reflected Step. Scared stiff, but it hadn't saved her. "Did you hear anything tonight just before the fire? Were you in the building? Hear a couple shots? Hear any screams?"

"No hear no-thing, train make too much noise. Only hear fella laff coming downstairs, like somebody tell-im good joke. Laff, laff, laff, all the way out to street—"

The marihuana, of course. Just two drags had affected his own risibilities. The effects of a whole reefer ought to last hours, at that rate. Step shoved away from the futile janitor, flagged one of the patrolmen holding the crowd in check behind the rope-barrier, introduced himself. The excitement was tapering off, now that everyone was out of the house and the fire had been subdued, it was only a matter of minutes before they'd start melting away. Overhead the "El" trains, which had been held back at Desbrosses Street while the smoke had been at its thickest, were again being allowed through, although surface traffic was still being detoured.

"Who's on this job with you?" Step asked the cop in a low voice.

"One other guy, down at the other end."

"Think the two of you can keep 'em in like they are, another couple minutes?"

The cop looked insulted. "That's what we been doing. You don't see anybody edging out into the middle of the street, do ya?"

"No, you don't understand what I mean. Can you put up another rope at each side, hem them in where they are, keep them from strolling off just a little while longer till I get a chance to take a careful look through them all?"

"I'm not authorized to keep people from going about their business, as long as they don't hamper the fire apparatus—"

"I'll take the responsibility. There's someone I'm out to get, and I've got a very good hunch he's right here looking on. Firebugs are known to do that, murderers too when they think they're safe from discovery. When you've got a combination of both, the urge to stay and gloat ought to be twice as strong!

"Bawl me out," he added abruptly, "so it don't look too phony, my standing talking to you like this."

The cop swung his club at him, barked: "Get back there! Whaddya think that rope's for? Get back there before I—"

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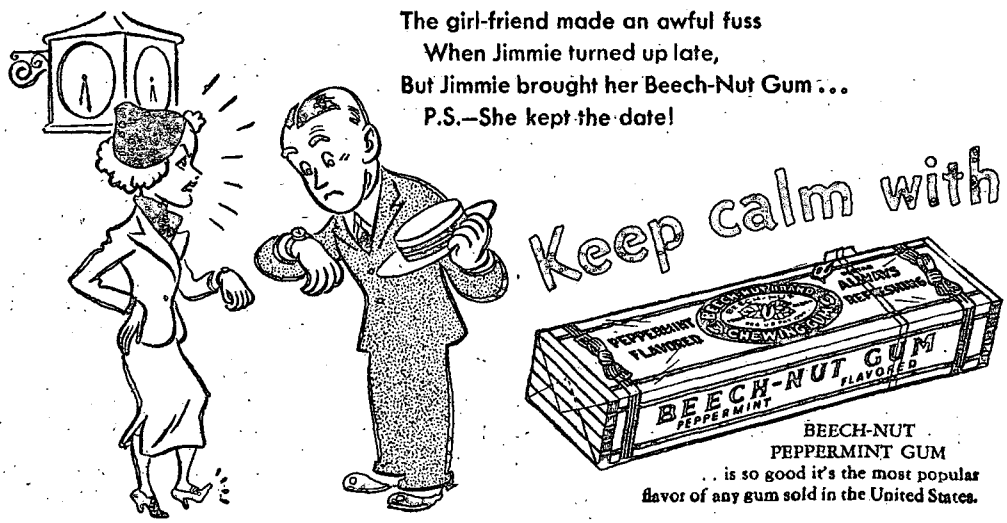
Step cringed away from him, began to elbow his way deeper into the tightly-packed crowd jamming the narrow sidewalk. He did this as slow as he did everything else, didn't seem like anyone who had a definite place to go, just a rubber-necker working his way toward a better vantage-point. From time to time he glanced over at the gutted building, or what could be seen of it under the shadowy "El" structure that bisected the street vertically. Torches blinked deep within the front hallway of it, as firemen passed in and out, still veiled by the haze that clung to it.

There wasn't, however, enough smoke left in the air, certainly not this close to the ground, to send anyone into paroxysms of strangled coughing. Such as that individual just ahead was experiencing, handkerchief pressed to mouth. Step himself had inhaled as much smoke as anyone, and his lungs were back on the job again as good as ever. He kept facing the burned building from this point on, edging over sidewise to the afflicted one. The spasms would stop and he'd lower the handkerchief; then another one would come on and he'd raise it again and nearly spill himself into it. Step was unobtrusively at his elbow by now.

When a person is suffering from a coughing-fit, two ways of assisting them will occur to almost anybody. Offer them a drink of water or slap them helpfully on the back. Step didn't have any water to offer, so he chose the second means of alleviation. Slapped the tormented one between the shoulder-blades: but just once, not several times, and not nearly forcefully enough to do any good. "You're under arrest," he said desultorily, "come on."

The concealing handkerchief dropped—this time all the way to the ground. "What for? What're you talking about?"

"For two murders and an arson," drawled the wearied Step. "I'm talking about you. And don't be afraid to laugh right out. No need to muffle it with your handkerchief and try to change it into a cough any more. That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was what gave you away to me. When you've been smoking marihuana, you've just gotta laugh or else— But watching fires isn't the right place to do your laughing. And if it had been real coughing, you wouldn't have stayed around where the smoke irritated you that much. Now show me where you dropped the gun before you came back here to watch, and then we'll get in a taxi. I wouldn't ask my feet to carry me another step tonight."

HIS prisoner bayed uncontrollably with mirth, then panted: "I never was in that building in my life—" Writhed convulsively.

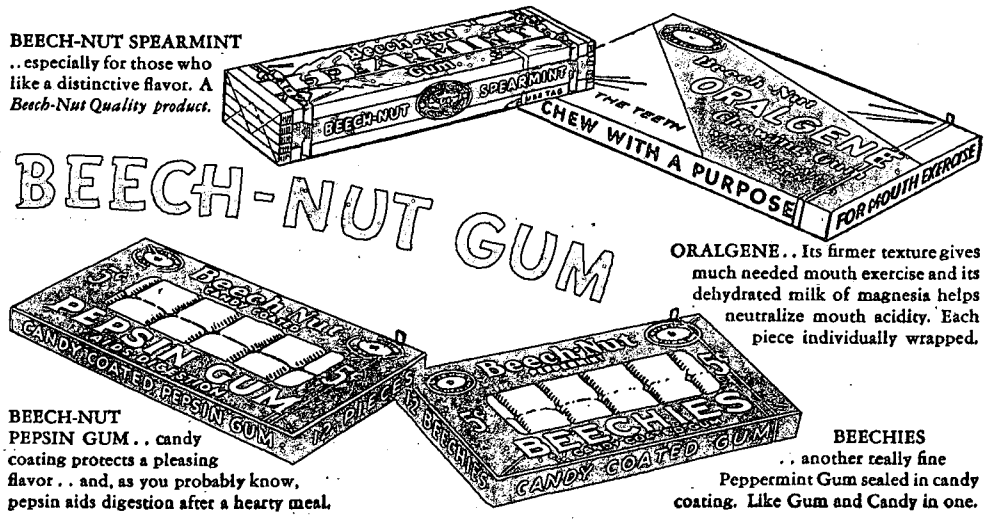
"I saw you," said Step, pushing him slowly before him through the crowd, "through the window from an 'El' train as I was going by." He knew the soporific effect the drug was likely to have, its blunting of the judgment. "She came to us and told us she was afraid of this happening to her, asked for protection, and we been giving it to her. Did you think you could get away with it?"

"Then what'd she rat on Plucky at his trial for? She knew what to expect. He sent out word—"

"Oh, that vice trial. And she was one of the witnesses? I see." Step slammed the door of the cab on the two of them. "Thanks for telling me; now I know who she was, who you are, and why it was done. There is something to be said for marihuana after all. Not much, but maybe just a little."

When he stepped out of the cab with his handcuffed quarry at the foot of the Franklin Street station four blocks away, he directed the driver: "Now sound your horn till they come down off of up there." And when they did, his mates found Inspector Stephen Lively seated upon the bottom step of the station-stairs, his prisoner at his side.

"Fellas," he said apologetically, "this is the guy. And if I gotta go up there again to the top, I wonder could you two make a saddle with your hands and hoist me between you. I'm just plumb tuckered out!"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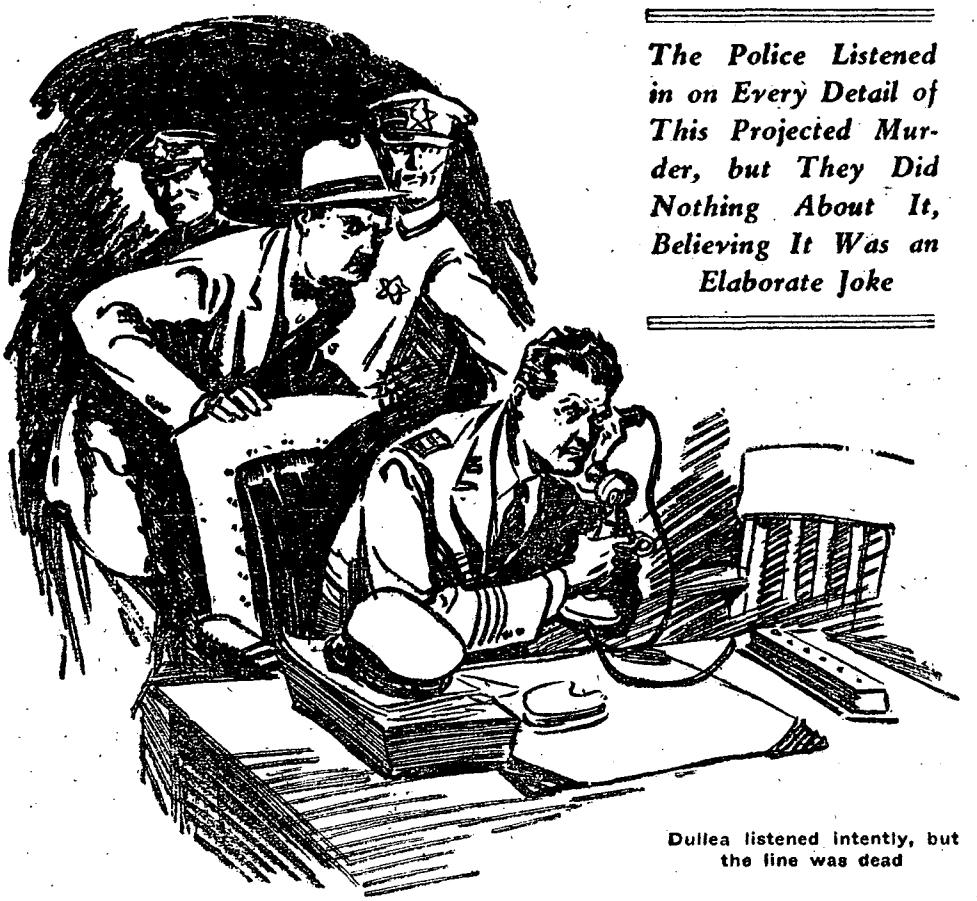
The Police Listened in on Every Detail of This Projected Murder, but They Did Nothing About It, Believing It Was an Elaborate Joke



Dullea listened intently, but the line was dead

The Imperfect Crime

By John Kobler

WARREN LOUW and his comely young wife were driving slowly through the moonlit night. The film they had just witnessed—a tender, little comedy of love and marriage—had left them with a sense of mellow contentment. Mrs. Louw, sighing happily, snuggled close to her husband's side as he gripped the wheel, intent on the glistening, coiling ribbon of road that wound through Twin Peaks and on to Kenwood Way. Surely violence and sudden tragedy were utterly foreign, unthinkable, in this soft, eucalyptus-scented night.

San Francisco lay below them, a tapestry of winking lights. Around the bend slumbered the newly-developed suburb, bristling with sleek, modernist bungalows. Here the Louws had made their home.

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As Warren Louw sighted his driveway he pressed down the accelerator in joyful anticipation of being home again. In the next instant the car swerved crazily, skinned a tree on the left side of the road. The headlights, stabbing through the night, had picked out an inert mass lying directly in the path of the speeding car and to avoid striking it Louw had been forced to twist his wheel sharply. Mrs. Louw screamed.

He laughed nervously. "Sorry, dear. For a minute I thought it was a woman."

"Heavens, what a start you gave me!"

"Stupid of me, darling. Probably just some old rags or newspapers or something." He shifted and backed on to the road.

As he was gathering momentum Mrs. Louw clutched his arm.

"Warren, wait! I saw it lying there, too. I've got the strangest feeling that it wasn't any bundle of rags or newspapers or anything else, but a—"

"Why, gosh, darling, if you think that we'll go back and look."

They sat stiffly apart now, nervous and apprehensive. Louw let the car slide backwards, while his wife craned her neck out the window, straining her eyes towards the spot where they had seen that still, disordered mass.

"It's here!" she cried.

They jumped out and hurried to the spot. Staring down, their hands groped instinctively for each other.

"Oh," was all Mrs. Louw could say. "Oh!"

"Poor old thing," Louw murmured.

They were looking at the body of an old woman. The moon had slid from behind a cloud and splashed a wide beam on the hatless, white head. She wore a red sweater and a pink housedress. She was frail and slight, and the parchment-white old face, blank in death, held gentility and breeding.

"She's — she's been run over," gasped Mrs. Louw.

Louw braced her with his arms. "Don't look, dear. Go back to the car."

But neither of them could avert their eyes from that limp, crushed body. The wheels of a heavy car had rolled across the abdomen. The woman's cheekbone—she lay on her back—was bruised.

"I'd like to get the guy who did this," Louw muttered between clenched teeth. "Another one of those hit-and-run skunks."

"We'd better telephone the hospital," said Mrs. Louw.

"Yeah, and the police. I'm not going to touch her. There may be some clue, some way of tracing whoever hit her."

A few minutes later Louw was barking excitedly into a telephone: "Park Emergency Hospital? Listen, this is Mr. Warren Louw, at 129 Kenwood Way. There's an old woman lying about a hundred yards down the road. She's been hit by a car. Yeah, dead. Better send somebody quick."

Presently the shrill whine of an ambulance siren sounded along the road. The Louws heard the ambulance grind to a stop and ran out to direct it. "This way," Louw shouted.

DR. JAMES CLARY knelt by the old woman's head. "Sure," he muttered, "it's a hit-and-run case. Looks like she was taking a little stroll, wandered out in the middle of the road and a car, sweeping around the bend, ran clean over her. Hasn't been dead very long. Body still warm." It was then shortly after ten.

Mrs. Louw shuddered. "Do you think they'll ever find the driver?"

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"Dunno, lady. He's probably three counties away by now. That's a job for the police."

"I wonder who she was."

"Well, this might help." He indicated a diamond ring on the right hand, and, removing it, read aloud the inscription, "'From Joe to Jessie.' Yes, that's certainly something."

"You know," put in Louw, who had been studying the dead woman's face fixedly, "I think she lived near us. Seems to me I've seen her walking in the evenings."

"So? Well, the police will be glad to know about it. All we can do now—" He nodded to one of the white-coated internes, standing at his elbow.

The latter said: "To the morgue."

II

CAPTAIN OF DETECTIVES, Charles Dullea, sharp-nosed and square-jawed, one of the slickest, coolest hounds of the law in the history of the San Francisco Police Department, was fiddling with a dictaphone record when Deputy Coroner Jane Walsh entered his office.

"Oh, Captain," she hailed him, "another hit-and-run case down at the morgue."

"Yes," he said, without looking up from the black disk, "it's getting to be a habit. Who is it this time?"

"That's just it. No identity. Doc Clary picked her up out Kenwood Way. She's an old lady, looks as though she had background and refinement. A car ran smack over her middle."

Dullea let the disk roll from his thick, knotted fingers. He stared wide-eyed at the lady coroner. "Did you say Kenwood Way?"

"Sure, why not?"

"Why not! Why not, indeed! It's—it's fantastic! It just couldn't happen, that's all!"

He made strange, rumbling noises in his throat. Deputy Walsh eyed him questioningly, but he had recovered. He was once more impassive, cool. "Come on," he said, "I want to see this woman."

But by the time they reached the city morgue the mystery of the dead woman's identity had been solved. A city boiler inspector, John J. Kane, having recognized her photograph in a late edition of the newspapers, had come forward.

"I know who she was," he told the morgue officials. "Her name was Mrs. Jessie Scott Hughes."

He repeated this information to Dullea when that troubled sleuth emerged from an examination of the body.

"What do you know about her?" Dullea asked.

"Well, not an awful lot. I just knew her in a casual sort of way. She's a widow, lives alone in a little house not far from where they found her body, three doors down from the people who found her, as a matter of fact—the Warren Louws. She had plenty of dough."

"That tallies with the ring I saw on her finger—'From Joe to Jessie.' I suppose 'Joe' was her husband."

"I suppose so."

"I can set your mind at ease on that point, gentlemen. *He was!*" This came from a tall, elegantly dressed man who had suddenly appeared in the corridor. His voice was musical and beautifully modulated.

Dullea wheeled around. "Frank Egan!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh, didn't you know? She—she was an old friend." He turned away, moved.

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"That's right," Kane piped. "Mrs. Hughes was a client of Mr. Egan here."

"Is that true, Egan?"

"Precisely true. She was not only a client, she was a dear, dear friend. I've known Jessie since—let me see—since the 'quake of 1906. I was driving a Wells Fargo Express wagon then. You remember how the whole city was fleeing madly from their homes. I saw this girl standing bewildered in the street with a small lad. I picked them up and drove them to the girl's sister.

"Ever since I've been in private law practice I've handled her legal and financial affairs. I—I think she would have wanted me to take charge of the funeral arrangements."

"Why, certainly, Egan, certainly, no objections there."

"And now, Captain, if you'll excuse me—this thing has shaken me horribly. If there's anything, anything I can do to find the man who struck Jessie down please let me know."

"I'll do that, Egan." Dullea watched the man's broad back disappear down the corridor.

THE presence of Frank J. Egan at the morgue had given the affair an atmosphere of prime importance and authority. The sympathetic-faced, keen-eyed man was one of the most beloved characters in San Francisco public life. By unswerving honesty and hard work he had risen from a policeman's beat to become a brilliant attorney and now, public defender.

It was Egan's function in life to succor the poor, the helpless, the misunderstood. There was no man, woman or child in the state too humble or too obscure to obtain Frank Egan's services. He had saved countless victims of circumstance from unjust prison sentences, and to others, convicts on parole, he had given fresh starts in life. His own chauffeur had served a prison term for burglary.

Back in his office Dullea summoned one of his crack detectives. "I want you to go with me to the home of the late Mrs. Jessie Hughes," he told him.

"What's up, Chief?"

"Oh, nothing much. Just that Mrs. Hughes was not an ordinary hit-and-run victim. In fact, she was murdered!"

The home of Mrs. Hughes was a pleasant, little white plaster house with a red roof. Dullea tried the front door. It was bolted. So was the back door and all the windows. The garage, which was attached to the house, was likewise locked.

"Looks like you were right, Chief," the detective said, "the old lady must have been scared of something or why should she have kept everything tighter than a clam? Shall I bust it open?"

Dullea nodded. A few minutes later they stood in a wide-beamed, cool living-room. All around them were cages filled with yellow canaries. The singing and rustling of tiny wings created a strange atmosphere. The two men pressed forward into the kitchen. On a white enamel table they saw a cluster of vegetables peeled, washed and ready to be cooked. Next to them stood a sauce-pan half-filled with water.

"Guess she was interrupted just as she was preparing supper," the detective ventured.

They continued to wander about the house. Presently they came to a small, white door which obviously led to the attached garage. Like all the other doors in the house it was locked and bolted on the inside. With a bunch of keys they found in a red purse they

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opened it and descended into the garage. The garage door, they found, was equipped with an automatic lock which locked when the door was slammed shut.

One of the keys from the red purse fitted this door. This would have been the only way of entering the house, but since the keys were found in the house and not on Mrs. Hughes's body it appeared that she had been taken out forcibly. What was more surprising, there was no car in the garage.

"What's the answer to that?" Dullea mused aloud. "A garage and no car."

"You heard what the lady next door said. Mrs. Hughes never did own a car. It just happened that the house she bought had a garage attached."

"Sure. Then I wonder what these tire-marks mean." He indicated a number of distinct patterns on the cement floor.

The detective consulted a small, black notebook. "That would be the blue Lincoln sedan driven by two men which the neighbors saw leave this house around 9:30 the night of Mrs. Hughes's death. I'm telling you, Chief—"

But Dullea was no longer listening. He was on one knee, passing his hand over a circular rubbed stain on the floor. Bending closer he picked up something between his fingers.

"What is it, Chief?"

"Look." He held up a number of white hairs. The roots were bloody.

"That's it! The old lady was done in just like you said."

"Yes, and I think I know how. Those two men drove the Lincoln sedan into this garage and Mrs. Hughes came around to meet them from the front. They knocked her down, threw her in the car, dumped the body on the road and then ran over it to make it look like a hit-and-run case. You remember she was wearing a sweater over an ordinary house-dress. My guess is that they slipped the sweater over her to make it seem as though she had been taking a walk when she was struck. Furthermore, I'll bet that bruise on her jaw was from a man's fist and this cleaned spot here was blood!"

"It fits, Chief. What's the next move?"

"To find that blue sedan."

III

THE body of Mrs. Jessie Hughes had been found on the evening of April 29, 1932. On the following Monday a blue Lincoln sedan, belonging to Lieutenant Oscar Postel, of the city fire department, was discovered in a public garage. The tire-tread matched those on the floor of Mrs. Hughes's garage.

The report of this discovery was brought to Dullea by one of the scores of detectives now working on the case.

"The garage man admitted that Postel's car had been borrowed on the night of the murder," he said, "and returned a few hours later. It was borrowed by a guy called Verne Doran."

"Verne Doran!" Dullea braced himself on the arms of his chair. "Do you know who Verne Doran is?"

"No, I don't know."

"Wait." He thumbed through some files on his desk. "Here it is: Verne Doran, paroled convict, up for burglary with weapons. Previously tried and acquitted of murder. Known to be an associate of Albert Tinnin, also an ex-convict, once suspected of murder. Here are pictures of them both."

Dullea tapped angrily on a pair of

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rogues'-gallery portraits. Tinnin had a long, ape-like face and close-set eyes. Doran had high cheek bones and wore a pencil-thin mustache.

"I want you to nab those guys so quick they won't know what struck 'em. I don't mind telling you that Doran is Frank Egan's chauffeur and Tinnin is one of the crooks Egan has tried to help go straight!"

The detective whistled shortly and dashed from the room.

But it wasn't as easy as all that. The city was scoured, but neither Doran nor Tinning could be found. When the newspapers broke the story that a pair of ex-convicts, protégés of the public champion, Frank Egan, were being sought in connection with the death of Mrs. Hughes, the citizenry preferred to put a creditable interpretation on Egan's position. His whole official work had consisted in protecting the legal rights of accused men who were without funds, in helping deserving prisoners to find jobs so that they could leave the prison walls with a prospect of making good. Tinnin's parole had been recent. It had been granted at Egan's request. What was suspicious about that?

On the evening of May 4, an amazing thing occurred. Dullea, eating a sandwich in headquarters, was called to the telephone. He recognized the voice at once. It was Egan.

"Listen," he whispered hoarsely—the man was clearly frightened—"they've got me. Two men have got me here. They think I'm phoning home. I'm in a booth at the Ferry Building and they're outside with guns—"

"Egan, who's got you? Who are they?" No answer. "Egan!" He jiggled the hook. The line was dead.

Dullea spun around and beckoned to an officer. "The Ferry Building. Hurry!"

THEY climbed into a police car and sped to the downtown sector. The Ferry Building loomed white and ominous in the moonless night. The car jerked to a halt and Dullea tumbled out. There was only one set of telephone-booths in the building, on the main floor. No one in sight but a sleepy elevator boy.

Dullea shook him. "Has any one used those 'phones in the last few minutes?"

"No, sir. I ain't seen any one."

"That's what I thought."

He returned to the car. "Go to Egan's house."

Dullea was received by Mrs. Egan, a charming, regal-looking woman. She was pale and worried.

"Mrs. Egan," Dullea began, dispensing with formalities, "it is essential that we locate your husband at once. Do you know what has become of him?"

"Oh, I wish I did. He drove away from this house last night. He—he's been acting rather strangely lately, almost as though he were afraid of something. Then a few hours ago I got a call from some man I don't know. He said: 'We've just taken Frank for a ride.' And hung up. I'm terrified, Captain Dullea, terrified. They'll do the same thing to him they did to poor Mrs. Hughes."

"Why do you say that, Mrs. Egan?"

"I don't know. I don't know what I'm saying."

"I don't think you have to worry. I think your husband is alive."

"I hope so."

"Is that all you wish to tell me, Mrs. Egan?"

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"That is all I know, Captain."

"Thank you, Mrs. Egan. Good night."

With Egan, Tinnin and Doran all missing, Dullea was not prepared for the surprise which awaited him back at headquarters. Verne Doran had been traced to a downtown speakeasy and arrested. A lieutenant greeted Dullea with the news.

"Chief," he cried, "we've got Doran and, boy, has he got a story to tell!"

"Been using pressure?"

"A little."

"He's told you that the real murderer of Jessie Hughes is Frank Egan."

"Judas, Chief, how did you know that?"

"I've known it for a long time."

VERNE DORAN squatted before Dullea's desk, his stiff hair matted with sweat, his face pasty and drawn. Around him the detectives formed a semi-circle, grim and silent, piercing him with their eyes. He was talking in a dull monotone.

"Egan had told us that he had been our friend and that it was a case of his life or Mrs. Hughes's. He told me that I owed him plenty, that he had got me out of jail and kept me out of it and that if I didn't do as he asked it would be easy for me to go back again.

"He said he was hard pressed for money and that he could get money if Mrs. Hughes died.

"He 'phoned to Mrs. Hughes and told her he was coming out with friends in a short time and that she was to have the garage door open as she had in the past. He told us that Tinnin was to knock her unconscious by striking her in the stomach and that my job was to run over her body. It was agreed that we were to make it look like a hit-run accident.

"We went over to her house and drove in the garage. We were in there for about an hour, talking to Mrs. Hughes. Finally, when she got restless, Tinnin gave me the sign and said for me to back in the car. As I got in he struck her in the stomach with his fist, then in the eye and a second time in the stomach. She fell without a sound.

"He dragged her under the right front wheel. Tinnin stood nearby and gave instructions to go forward and back, forward and back. I obeyed. We then drove around the neighborhood looking for a place to leave her and every time we'd stop either a car or a pedestrian would pass. Finally, we found a dark spot and Tinnin dumped the body out.

We turned out the lights, drove furiously for a few blocks, then put the car away.

"Egan called me Monday and told me to get away, that the police were on the trail. The one big slip we made was about the house key. Egan forgot to tell us that she should have a key on her so it would look as if she had gone out walking."

But Doran was wrong. There had been many slips. Egan had a secretary, a Miss Marion Lambert. This girl now offered the information that Egan had been in trouble about personal finances and clients' money and that Mrs. Hughes herself had stormed into his office a few days before her death, demanding a showdown. Furthermore, Egan was not at the prize-fights, as he had let various officials understand, but was seen pacing up and down before Mrs. Hughes's house at 9:30 on the evening of April 29! In-

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cidentally, Egan was named sole heir in Mrs. Hughes's will.

Further inquiries into Egan's personal finances revealed that he had been gambling with the moneys of various clients and was in debt to the tune of $19,000. He was also about to lose his home, which was heavily mortgaged.

Dullea was not the sort of detective to send his case before a grand jury without substantiation of every detail. In this complex task he was brilliantly assisted by Police Chemist Frank Latulipe. The tire-tracks in Mrs. Hughes's garage were carefully photographed and impressions were taken in plaster. They showed the right tire was smoother than the left and that its thread left peculiar marks from the vacuum cups—marks like tiny horse-shoes. They were unlucky for Egan, those horse-shoes. Similar impressions were taken from Mrs. Hughes's clothes.

The most damning clues were the eight white hairs found by Dullea. Other hairs were found caught in the fender of the suspected death-car and under a microscope these hairs matched exactly with those found in the garage and with the hair of Mrs. Hughes!

It was the icy presentation of these facts which brought Verne Doran to a complete confession. Albert Tinnin, too, was found and grilled by Dullea for 108 hours in a room at the Hotel Whitcomb.

But Frank Egan was still missing.

IV

IT was a tribute to the rôle which Egan had been acting for twelve years that half the population of San Francisco refused to believe in his guilt. To them it appeared incredible that this kindly, humanitarian worker, who had done so much for the downtrodden and the defenseless, should be capable of so monstrous a hypocrisy. As for the cold-blooded murder of a feeble, old woman, their imagination balked at it.

The controversy assumed a political color. It centered about the whole public defender system and the antagonism which naturally exists between the police seeking a conviction and officials on the defense side.

The parole system, too, was violently attacked.

Dullea had called forth a storm upon his head when he denounced Frank Egan as a murderer.

On June 7, more than a month after the death of Mrs. Hughes, Egan was still missing. Mayor Angelo Rossi, flustered under the stinging charges flung against the police department, lashed Dullea verbally for not finding him. He warned him to do so immediately or risk his job.

At that moment Dullea's men were hot on Egan's trail and by nightfall had traced him to a private sanitarium operated by a Mrs. Bronescoe. He had been brought there by his lawyer, Vincent Hallinan, pale and haggard and starving. Mrs. Bronescoe told the police that his mind was affected. He had suffered horribly from malnutrition and exposure.

"Very well," said Dullea, "we'll give him time to recover."

It was the one serious mistake Dullea made throughout the case. The moment the guard's vigilance relaxed Egan skipped again. This time he was trailed to Emerald Lake. Hallinan admitted that he had gone to his cottage there, but when the police arrived Egan was gone. Ten officers searched the district all night.

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Meanwhile a county grand jury had seen things Dullea's way. They returned murder indictments against Egan, Tinnin and Doran, conceding that the Public Defender had been the master mind of the unholy trio.

Hallinan pleaded ineffectually with the District Attorney that Doran alone had committed the crime for a wretched fifty dollars!

On June 9 Egan surprised everybody by calmly giving himself up. He was a broken man. There was no more fight in him. He went to trial a few weeks later.

THE trial lasted one month. It was the rawest melodrama from opening to finish. Marion Lambert, Egan's secretary who testified against him, was threatened with gang vengeance and had to be protected.

Egan's attorney went so far in defying Judge Dunne's rulings that the court did what it has so often threatened to do and so seldom has actually done—sent him to jail for contempt.

He actually stayed there for twenty-four hours.

The trial concerned itself largely with the personality of Frank Egan. If ever a human being was equipped by natural aptitude plus training to plan and execute the perfect crime it was San Francisco's Public Defender. He had been a policeman in constant contact with the underworld's petty thugs and thieves, next an ace detective, familiar with the innermost workings of the criminal mind, and lastly an attorney, agile in adapting the twists and turns of a complex legal system to his own uses.

Yet when it came to organizing a crime, he failed just as thousands have failed before him and failed, as the most muddle-headed brigand has failed—through some idiotic oversight. The police call them "banana peels."

THE murder-plot, however, was not without elements of cleverness. Determined to fulfill the prime function of the perfect crime, Egan had planned that the death of Mrs. Hughes should not appear to be a crime at all, but an accident. He had counted more on this than on the concealment of clues. And it was his undoing.

Egan knew the frequency of hit-run deaths and how rarely they were solved. He had little to fear from the police's ordinarily haphazard check-up. He was, then, utterly caught off guard when Dullea immediately characterized the tragedy as murder. Fifty per cent of the success of his plan had depended on concealing this fact.

After that the numerous errors he had made stood out like sore thumbs. He should never have employed as accomplices two men who were known to be convicts and also known to have been associated with him. He should have known that one or both of them would talk. His failure to warn them to plant a key on Mrs. Hughes' body, his anxiety to account for himself on the night of the crime, his obviously spurious attempt to convince Dullea that he had been kidnaped and his subsequent escape from the sanitarium, above all, his failure to conceal the state of his finances and his quarrel with Mrs. Hughes—these spelled but one thing to the mind of a trained detective like Charles Dullea: *guilt!*

Despite the unbreakable net of evidence against the murderous trio the jury deliberated for seventy-two hours before reaching a verdict. In fact, such was the power of the legend which Egan had spun around his own

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falsely-haloed head for twelve years, that jurors Bradley Webb and Mrs. Annie J. Riley, held out for unconditional acquittal. Under the strain of the long hours Mrs. Riley had become quite hysterical.

But in the end the seven men and five women filed back into the court and delivered their verdict. All three defendants were found guilty of murder without any extenuating circumstances. They were sentenced to life imprisonment.

Egan, a shattered, half-crazed man, is still in San Quentin.

Long after the murder of Jessie Hughes was a closed issue the general public was still ignorant of the most fantastic feature of this completely fantastic case. And this was how Captain Charles Dullea had known almost at once that Mrs. Hughes had been murdered. It was not intuition. Detectives disclaim this quality in serious work. It was not one of those lightning-flashes of deduction such as adorn the pages of mystery novels. It was something far more conclusive than either. Dullea had heard Egan plan the crime months before its actual accomplishment!

It happened in this way: Dullea had planted a dictaphone in the office of a physician who was under suspicion in connection with another case. Egan and his henchmen were acquainted with this doctor and it was in his office that they discussed in all its details the projected murder of Mrs. Hughes, *while the police listened in!* Every detail was overheard: the method, the car that would be used, the place—everything.

But the police did nothing about it because they thought the thing was too fantastic to be anything more than an elaborate joke. Furthermore there was nothing they could do about it until the potential killers in some way showed their hand. They did take the elementary precaution of providing Mrs. Hughes with unseen bodyguards. After awhile, convinced they were misled, they withdrew them. Soon after Mrs. Hughes was murdered.

Little wonder Dullea had blanched when reports of the supposed hit-run case reached him and little wonder, too, that he kept silent about this until he had solved the case on the external facts alone.

Of all the perfect crimes ever planned this one, discussed within full hearing of the police, was the strangest. It made master-mind Frank Egan appear a trifle foolish.

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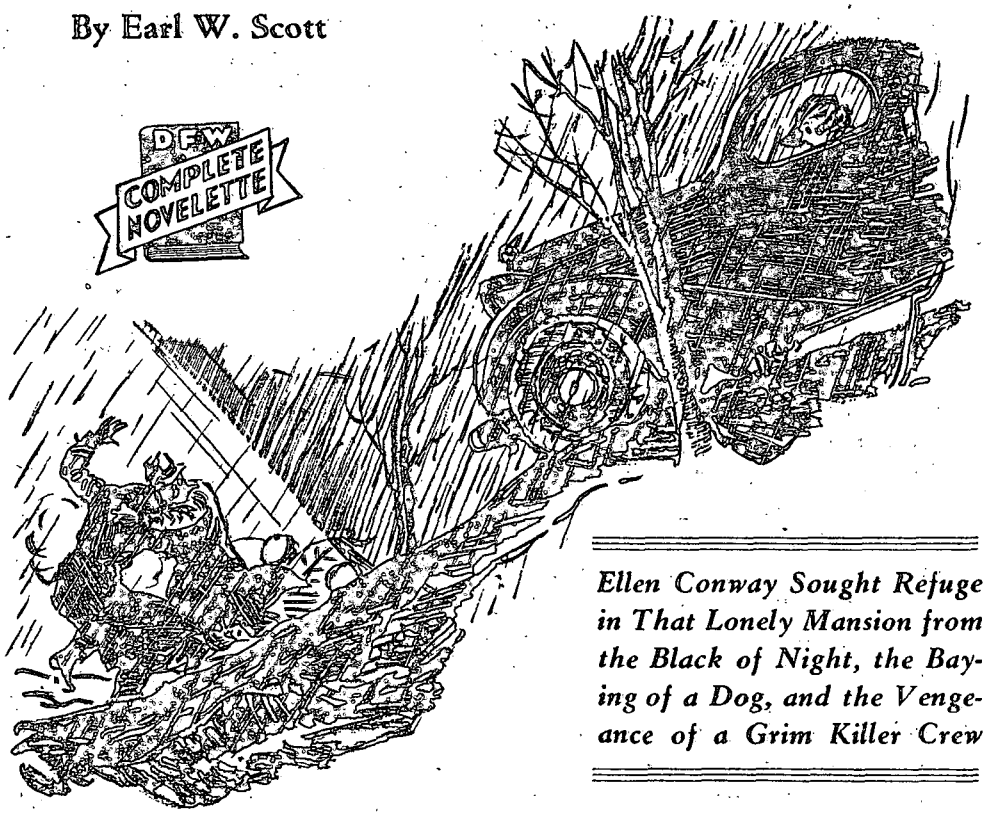
Kato Cries Kill

By Earl W. Scott



She could see two men fighting madly beside the stalled sedan

Ellen Conway Sought Refuge in That Lonely Mansion from the Black of Night, the Baying of a Dog, and the Vengeance of a Grim Killer Crew

CHAPTER I

Refuge from the Storm

ELLEN CONWAY tugged grimly at the balky wheel of her little coupé, tired eyes glued to the weaving taillight of the big car ahead.

It was making bad business of the deeply rutted detour and every moment threatened to spin sloshing directly across the single-track lane, completely blocking progress. The night was kettle-black. About in the watery darkness, tree clumps huddled together disconsolately, drooping with the weight of the steady downpour.

Slim shoulders hunched stiffly in her damp little jacket, soft lips settled in stubborn defiance, Ellen wrestled with the treacherous traction.

The windshield wipers raced, sobbing, as she slowed for the unmarked turn—then with a gasp she ducked for the emergency brake, knobby oxford kicking frantically at the clutch pedal. Fifty yards below, in a steep dip, the green sedan had come to a halt, fronting a narrow bridge. Its rear wheels were in the ditch, brilliant lights tilting skyward.

But it wasn't the crazy slewing of her own machine that tore the choked cry from Ellen's lips, sending her forward to press her face against the cold glass.

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Men were struggling there in the ditch, fighting desperately! Siding the open door of the sedan, their tall figures were bobbing and churning grotesquely. Momentarily their white faces showed but they were too far away to recognize.

Both wore raincoats that flopped and cloyed about their legs as they threshed doggedly up the ditch bank.

Ellen swabbed futilely at the glass with a moist palm but the distorting silvery screen of water was all on the outside.

Suddenly the men seemed to fall apart and the next instant the darting violet flame of two swift shots split the murk. They closed again, blending in silent struggle.

Then one of the indistinct figures tossed up its arms and sank to the muddy roadway. The other swooped down, began tugging the inert form toward the open door of the car, bundling him like a soggy bag of meal.

With a sob, Ellen closed her eyes against that vision of limp sprawling arms, a pasty white blur of a blood-stained face. Then she doused her lights.

Fumbling at the catch, she pushed open her near door and shoved out across the running board. Thought of turning, even the light coupé, for flight from that squashy quagmire was hopeless.

One thought was urging her tired muscles to action. Granting murder had been done, the killer might investigate those prying beams from behind.

Lifting her skirt high, she plunged across the water-filled ditch and scrambed up the slippery bank to bring up abruptly before a tall iron fence.

With startling suddenness, lightning tore at the horizon line and Ellen glimpsed, through the steel-picketed barrier, landscaped grounds, sentineled by tall trees and the occasional huddle of crouching shrubbery.

She gasped with relief at the twinkle of lights glowing through the partly curtained windows of a house resting on a knoll some quarter of a mile distant.

Then, below on the road, the purring of the sedan's motor rose to a soft roar.

Hands clutching the steel picket tips, Ellen hesitated. If the big car straightened out, continued its flight, her best course was to return to her own car. If not—

Groaning and creaking, those wildly spinning wheels sought for and found traction in the road ruts again. The car settled into movement, creeping inexorably backward.

That settled it. Her arrival had been noticed, was being investigated.

Teeth set grimly over her quivering lips, Ellen clambered upward and over those sharp-spiked pickets, tearing her skirt and gouging her hip cruelly.

The next instant she was racing across the hillside. It was uneven going and twice she pitched headlong. Finally, soaked to the skin, and panting heavily, she approached the house only to bring up abruptly behind a syringa bush. With breath-taking suddenness, the savage baying of a dog cut the silence.

THERE was something terrifying about that deep-throated challenge. For the instant her knees went weak, then grimly she darted forward again, making for the shelter of the wide veranda.

Stumbling on the top step, she slid forward, almost to the feet of the tall man who abruptly appeared in the doorway. Above, a light flooded on.

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"What the hell?" he growled, peering suspiciously.

A second figure appeared at his elbow, shorter, heavier. Both glared down at the girl.

Gasping, Ellen struggled to her feet. "There was a shooting down on the detour!" She waved a smudgy palm. "They—they saw me—driving up—I ran—you'd better phone Conningsby."

"Just a minute, Paget." The shorter man shouldered forward. Ellen noted vaguely that he wore baggy knickers and plaid stockings. He spoke from a mouth that was like a steel trap. His sharp, small blue eyes swept over her. "Now, young lady, what's this about shooting?"

Ellen passed a hand wearily over her eyes, drooping weakly. He seized her elbow. "Get inside where you can sit down," he suggested.

Ellen's eyes lifted falteringly to the taller man. There was an air of startled menace in his dark, high cheekboned face. His mouth was a slash.

"Yeaha," he offered. "Start talkin', baby—"

"Shut up," snapped the other. "Here, Miss, over by the fire."

Still gasping weakly, Ellen crossed the large, cheery room with its deep chairs and low, wide divan backed by a broad winding stair, to sink gratefully down before the generous, glowing fireplace.

"Why, it's like I said," she offered, brushing wet hair from her face. "I was driving along the detour behind the big green sedan. The road was terrible and I was afraid I'd slide into him when he slowed for the dips—"

"My gosh, get on with it!" burst out the tall Paget. "The shooting—who—?"

"Stow the gab," snarled the shorter man. "She's doing her best."

"Okay, Kessler," clipped Paget. "If that was a Tavelli stick-up, we've plenty time for fairy tales."

"Go on, Miss," Kessler scowled, patting her shoulder, but there seemed savage hurry in his action. The girl's eyes had suddenly widened on his broad, intent face. "Tavelli?" she murmured.

"A guest we were expecting," he offered. "Now, what happened?"

She swallowed, wetting her lips, then she smiled faintly, spreading her hands. "A fight in the deep pit where the road bridges the creek. The sedan was in the ditch when I made the turn—two men started shooting—one dropped—the other put him in the car. I ran, climbing over the fence when he started backing toward my coupé. I saw the house lights—then that terrible dog—" She shuddered.

"Kato," explained Kessler. "The watch dog—but he's chained."

"And just who the devil are you?" Paget scowled at her.

Ellen wet her lips. "Why, Ellen Conway. I've been making a survey for the State Board of Public Education. This is my new district." She flinched back from the quizzical appraising eyes. "I—I was headed for Conningsby—" she faltered—"when—"

"And this sedan, it was green, you said?" It was Kessler speaking.

"Yes—a Packard, I think."

"And the men—hard to see, of course—?"

"Yes. I didn't recognize them, naturally. They wore raincoats—"

Paget's and Kessler's glances clashed above the drooping girl. Each carried a burning question. Kessler nodded.

Paget swung away with an oath. "This is a hell of a state of affairs," he growled. "Tavelli'll think—"

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"Better take Kato and get down there," snapped Kessler. "You can pick up Miss Conway's car. She'll be staying here tonight."

Ellen started up. "Oh, no," she objected hurriedly. "I must be getting on—"

"Yeah," Paget wheeled round, speaking gruffly. "We're not fixed for guests—"

"We're fixed swell," Kessler spoke evenly, holding the other's rebellious glance. "Best 'tend to things, Paget, outside."

WITH a muttered curse, the tall man turned and strode out the doorway. Kessler smiled, a bit grimly Ellen thought, and reached for a cigarette, holding out the case.

"The detour, it appears," he said, "is not such a safe place for ladies traveling alone at night." He sank into a chair, nodding, his big head topped by its mane of reddish-blond hair. "Contrary to Paget, we've plenty of room. My wife—Mrs. Kessler—"

"Yes?"

They both turned at the low spoken voice on the stairs. A woman was descending. Ellen saw first the tiny silver slippers with rhinestone buckles. After that the sweep of silken skirts.

Ellen sat tensely watching the length of dull green crêpe come into her line of vision—the beautiful white arm—the hand that caressed the rail as it descended. The polished, crimsoned nails. Ellen frowned. It looked almost as if the woman had dipped her fingertips in blood. Kessler rose.

"Irene," he said, "this is Miss Conway, a representative of the State Educational Department."

Ellen rose, smiling. "I'm glad to know you," she said simply.

Mrs. Kessler paused, puzzlement tugging at her thread-thin brows as she bowed acknowledgment. Her eyes drifted slowly over Ellen. She saw a slightly built young woman in a well-tailored tweed suit, a rumpled blouse of egg-shell crêpe and a small, rather forlorn brown felt hat. Ellen had large, serious gray eyes, fringed with up-curling black lashes. A tip-tilted nose, a wide mouth and a chin which jutted definitely. The hair showing under the wet hat was dark brown.

She swept regally toward the fire, speaking in a low, throaty contralto. "Of course you know we have no children here, Miss Conway," she said, "if it's a survey—" She reached languidly for a cigarette on the mantel.

Ellen broke in hurriedly. "Oh no, nothing like that! I was going to Conningsby. There was trouble below on the road and I—"

"Yes—some thugs in a stick-up," said Kessler. "Miss Conway sought temporary sanctuary and I've just suggested she stay the night."

Irene Kessler had whirled, the cigarette snapping in her slim fingers. "Why—why, of course!" Her tones had thickened, wide, brown eyes on her husband's face. "Tavelli—" the half whispered word formed on her lips, then she said: "Ralph, do you suppose our—our guest is in trouble?"

Kessler's thick shoulders lifted in a slight shrug. "The car was a green Packard, but there are many such. There was some shooting. Miss Conway didn't wait. I've sent Paget down."

Ellen's eyes were on the woman's face that had suddenly drained of color. She was strikingly beautiful, limned in fire glow, with stormy red hair like a crown and her curves displayed in the simple draping folds of the jade-green gown.

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Her questioning glance tore free of her husband's and she relaxed with an effort, turning to Ellen:

"It all must have frightened you out of your wits, you poor child," she murmured. "You must get off your coat and those uncomfortable wet things before dinner." She turned, pressing a bell. "Some of my clothes—" she suggested.

But Ellen interrupted. "Oh, I've a bag in my car. Mr. Paget is bringing it up—"

THE door at the rear opened and a tall gaunt woman entered. She came silently on large, strong feet, waiting patiently, eyes on her mistress's face.

"Dilke," Irene Kessler said, "show Miss Conway to the west room and prepare a bath for her. She will be having dinner with us. Paget is bringing in her things. Mrs. Dilke will take care of you, Miss Conway."

Dilke bowed stiffly and without a word started upstairs. Ellen thanked her hostess and followed the woman. She held her eyes on Mrs. Dilke's feet. They moved just ahead of her, with the slow, methodical precision of machines. She wore a neat, black uniform and a little white apron and cap. The black skirt rustled faintly as she moved. There was an indefinable, harsh efficiency about her.

The upper hall was in darkness but Dilke pressed a light and led the way silently to the far end where she opened a door, snapped a button and stood aside for Ellen to enter. Crossing over, she touched a match to a fire that was already laid, opened the door, gesturing the bath.

Ellen nodded brightly, jerked off her hat, running fingers through her damp hair. Her glance returned to the woman, noting curiously the long, gaunt face, tanned the color of mahogany. Light glistened on her iron-gray hair, the high polished cheek bones, the stubborn jaw. Dilke stood, hands folded across her flat stomach, regarding Ellen unemotionally, and said:

"I'll fetch your bag when it comes. Is there anything else I can get for you?"

Ellen tried her most winning smile. "Nothing at all, thank you, Mrs. Dilke. You don't know how I appreciate being allowed to stop here."

Dilke's eyes flared wide in a startled look. For a long moment she stared at Ellen, then with an audible grunt, she marched to the door and went out.

Slowly Ellen crossed to the window, drummed at by the monotonous rain. She had a sudden unaccountable feeling of tension, of actual menace about the big, silent house. "Nerves," she muttered irritably, then shivered at sound of the droning wind in the dark, tossing treetops outside.

That had been a close call in the lane. A bit nearer, she might have stopped a stray bullet herself. And the man Tavelli, the expected guest. Was his the gruesome white-faced body tumbled so unceremoniously into the car or the furtive, active figure that had weathered the fight unscathed and driven ruthlessly away in the rain? And what was at the bottom of it all? Like a whirling pinwheel, thoughts drummed at her brain—the green sedan—the shots in the night—her wild flight — her nervous hosts — and through it all the savage motif of a dog baying defiance at the storm.

The lights of a car burst sweeping up the drive. It whirled to a stop before the steps—a small, mud-spattered machine—her coupé.

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She turned away, catching sight of her face in the dresser mirror.

It showed drawn and white. She said through suddenly trembling lips, "Scared of the dark, you little fool. Buck up!"

Minutes later, Dilke was rapping on her door.

CHAPTER II

Death Is a Joke

DOWNSTAIRS, Ralph Kessler faced a grim-lipped, mud-bespattered Paget. "The kid's story's jake," Paget muttered glumly. "I could see where the big bus had slid into the ditch—footprints messin' up the mud and considerable blood splashed round."

Kessler, leaning against the mantel, growled deep in his throat. The woman Irene sat tensely forward in a deep chair, slender fingertips tapping at the arms.

"Tavelli?" she spoke hoarsely. "You think he was sapped? Who could have—?"

Kessler laughed harshly, shrugging thick shoulders. "Catch that big wop napping? Nix. My guess is he was on the business end of the gat. Some hitch hiker picked his big can for a plum and got ironed for his pains."

Irene relaxed, sinking back. Paget surged forward. "If that's the setup, where's Tavelli now?" he gritted.

"Be your age," snapped Kessler, fishing for a smoke with steady fingers. "Can you picture Tavelli leaving a stiff parked in our front yard?" He tapped his pocket. "I got a grand here says Tavelli shows up within the hour. Any takers?"

Paget wet his lips, eyes glittering. "Yessing that fairy tale, what about the girl?"

"We've answered that," Kessler said. "She's sticking here tonight."

"My gosh!" Paget snapped. "We don't want any strangers around with Tavelli coming. We've worked long enough jockeying him into this spot and now this mealy-mouthed girl—"

Irene Kessler lifted her gorgeous head. "Don't be stuffy, Vance. Ralph's right. Turn her loose and by the time she reached Conningsby, the stickup would have grown to a second St. Mihiel with her a Joan of Arc. Want the State Troopers on our doorstep?"

"Just simple country folks, that's us," added Kessler, speaking on smoke, "with nothing to worry about. How about her car? Look okay?"

Paget nodded gloomily. "Oh, she's what she claims to be, I guess. Went through a brief case I found there. Lots of dope from the Board of Education, blanks and what-not."

"Well, then why the temp'?" Kessler said with a shrug. "The kid looks fagged. She'll turn in and we'll handle Tavelli in the living room."

"Providing he isn't a corpse in a culvert somewhere," Paget said sourly.

"Just a little ray of sunshine," Kessler growled, tossing butts into the fire.

"Skip it," came savagely from Paget. "Everything set?"

The eyes of the two men met and held in a glance of bleak unfriendliness. Kessler nodded. "Everything's set. I hope Tavelli shakes it up. I'm starved."

"Aren't you changing?" his wife asked languidly, eyes dark with distaste on his thick bungling figure. "You surely aren't going to meet Tavelli in that rig, Ralph?"

Kessler glanced over himself grumpily. "Tavelli ain't comin' to see how I dress," he growled. "Might slick

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up some at that," he agreed reluctantly and stalked off toward the stairs.

He mounted heavily, humming tunelessly. When the last echo of his ponderous steps had died away, Mrs. Kessler rose, came to the mantel and leaned beside Paget. They stood motionless for a moment, then her head lifted, her shadowed eyes met his. Faint color tinged her white cheeks.

She said in a low, breathy whisper, "'Darling! It will soon be over."

His eyes took fire at the light in hers. Impulsively his arm went round her. They stood close for a moment, then she broke free, studying his oddly from pansy brown eyes.

"'No chances, Vance," she said under her breath. "'Too much at stake. You don't think there's a possibility of Tavelli letting us down?"

He shook his head. "'No. He's as anxious as we are to get things settled. He's been cadgy but, well, he's a cautious bird. We had to convince him we were on the up and up."

"'Odd," she mused, "'that none of us know him. He's been a name to us for so long, something to conjure with, and all, but none of us has ever seen him."

"'Few people have, Irene. That's his rôle. He sticks a recluse in that Boul' Mich' mansion. His yes-man makes the contacts. He takes few chances."

"He took one to-night. Let's hope he's not shooed off."

They were silent for a time and the drum of the rain formed a somber background to their thoughts. Then Irene glanced apprehensively toward the second floor.

"Ralph!" she said under her breath. "'He's cautious, too."

"Yes, damn him!" Paget muttered, eyes furtive. He looked sideways at the woman, held his voice low. "You understand, Irene, there's no going on with our—plans—tonight. Not with that damned girl in the house."

The woman's eyes went sullen. "I'm superstitious, Vance. I dislike postponing—plans."

He stirred impatiently. "But you're not so dumb as to think—" He turned quickly as the door at the rear opened and Mrs. Dilke entered.

"When will you have dinner, madam?" she asked in her emotionless voice, and waited, hands folded on her flat stomach.

The two by the fire watched her curiously, then Irene said, "Come here, Dilke."

THE woman advanced slowly, stopped, big feet firmly planted. Irene's lovely eyes went slowly over her, contempt fighting with something that was strangely like fear.

"Dilke," she spoke low, "you understand, we must postpone our—plans for tonight. We have a guest."

"I presumed as much, madam."

"How about the girl?" Irene continued. "'What was in her dressing case?"

"'Dry underclothes. Stockings. Powder. Cream. Toothbrush and paste, a silk frock and a pair of pumps. Also pajamas and dressing gown."

Irene smiled faintly. "You notice things, don't you, Dilke?"

"'Yes, madam. The young lady requested," Dilke added tonelessly, "'that she have her dinner served upstairs."

Irene started. Paget frowned. "'The devil!" he snapped. "'She did, eh?"

"Yes. She complained of a very bad headache. Expects to retire early. There is no objection, I suppose?"

She held her brilliant eyes on the two faces before her, Susan Dilke, who

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served her betters so efficiently. Irene said slowly, "No objection, of course. Do as she asks."

Paget laughed shortly. "Very accommodating young lady, I'd say. I don't think Tavelli would have appreciated a guest." He straightened suddenly. "There! That's a car. It'll be Tavelli!" He strode to the door, threw it open, admitting a cold breath of wet air.

Irene turned, eyes bright with interest.

"Excellent," she said. "Somehow, I never really believed—" She glanced at the servant. "Postpone dinner until Mr. Tavelli is ready."

The woman bowed. Irene started toward the door, paused, came back and stood close to Dilke, looking down on her for all the old woman was not short.

"Dilke," Irene breathed, "you wouldn't be so foolish as to—well—attempt anything on your own?" Through the caressing sweetness of the tones ran a thin thread of hardness. In the shadow of her gorgeous hair, Irene Kessler's pansy brown eyes were bleak as sleet. "You wouldn't make any mistakes, would you, Dilke?" she repeated.

Dilke met that regard with dark, unwinking eyes, behind the gleaming spectacles. "No, madam," she said tonelessly. "No mistakes."

"Excellent. Your position in this matter is not too secure, Dilke, remember that. You rather forced yourself into the picture, you know."

Dilke's lips hardened slightly. Her eyes did not falter. "What I accidentally overheard between you and Mr. Vance—" she began, then paused. "I am an old woman," she continued. "I have only myself to depend on. Surely the blame is not too great if I—"

"Muscle in on our deal?" Irene finished. "No, I suppose not, but don't forget the answers, that's all." She turned toward the door.

Susan Dilke stood very straight and still, staring after her. Over the mahogany calmness of her face passed a quick spasm of feeling, contorting those impassive features into the semblance of a twisted mask. Then she shrugged, turned and marched back to her own domain.

Ralph Kessler came down the stairs just then, looking stuffed and uncomfortable in a tux'. Above him, at the stair head, Ellen Conway appeared, hesitated, then backed swiftly into the shadows of the upper hall. She had evidently come from the bath, for her bare feet were thrust into Pullman pumps, and a Japanese crêpe kimono was wrapped about her. Her brown hair clung damply to her flushed face. She stood there uncertainly, out of sight, but watching the arrival of Louis Tavelli.

He filled the doorway as he strode in, attended by the Kesslers and Vance Paget. He was tall, well set up, in his early forties, she judged, with heavy, dark hair, liberally sprinkled with gray, eyes concealed behind thick-lensed glasses and a rock hard chin which jutted aggressively. He laughed shortly, glasses gleaming as he fingered an ugly scratch along his cheek bone. Brief sentences reached her, filled by the ejaculations of the others.

"Little unpleasantness down the road," he was saying. "Cheap red-hot—quick cash—" and something about a haystack where the lad could sleep it off. Kessler was roaring, slapping his thigh and Paget's rasping cackle chilled her spine.

Ellen shuddered, covering her eyes. Suddenly she was fearing and hating

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them all. What was so amusing about death? White-faced she turned, hurrying for her room.

CHAPTER III

Lock-Out

KESSLER spoke of the girl's presence in the living room, waiting for dinner to be announced. Paget slouched in a chair beside the fire. Irene draped gracefully on the end of the divan. Louis Tavelli, with a taped jaw, but looking otherwise fit, after a quick freshening, listened with a distinct frown.

"A damned nuisance," Kessler admitted, "but we thought it best to hold her till morning. By then we'll have all cleared. Paget's fanned her car. She's jake, I guess—just a little featherweight that believes in Santa Claus—" He turned sharply at a quick tap on the door. It opened and Ellen paused on the threshold.

"Oh, please pardon me," she gasped, stepping into the room. "I am such a coward about storms. And I took an aspirin tablet and felt ever so much better. I just had to come down." She stopped, seeming to see Tavelli for the first time. "I'm sorry," she said uncertainly, and half turned away.

Kessler's face flushed with quick anger. Irene was sitting up taut as a fiddle string. Paget was plainly glowering. Only Tavelli smiled, a very thin, hard-to-understand smile, as his eyes, behind the distorting glasses, went over the slim, girlish figure in the peach blow dinner frock of taffeta, with the innocent sprigs of rosebuds decorating it.

Kessler spoke with thinly veiled impatience. "Happy to have you join us, of course, Miss Conway. This is Mr. Tavelli."

Ellen gave an old-fashioned curtsy. "How do you do, Mr. Tavelli?" she greeted in her flute-like voice, and little flames of color darted up her cheeks.

Tavelli straightened from where he leaned on the mantel, came forward, holding out his hand. A strong, muscular hand, with long spatulate fingers. Uncertainly, Ellen placed her own hand within his and it closed like a vise. He said, still with that queer unreadable smile, "I am happy to meet you, Miss Conway. It's a beastly night, isn't it?"

Just then Mrs. Dilke announced dinner.

WAITING dessert, Tavelli opened his cigarette case. Kessler said impulsively, "I've choice Russian ones I'd like you to try. Rather different." He reached for the bell, let his hand fall. "Dilke couldn't find them," he muttered. "Excuse me. I'll bring them. They're upstairs." He shoved back his chair and went out. Tavelli laid his case on the table. The door closed behind Kessler.

Returning from his room and halfway downstairs, Kessler paused, eyes narrowed and suddenly suspicious on the lighted transom of the living room below and to his right. Through the tipped glass he saw the gaunt form of Mrs. Dilke crouched over the table. He leaned forward, and his lips went to a thin line. The woman had the telephone receiver to her ear. Her head was turned anxiously toward the door.

Kessler descended on cat-soft feet, padded to the closed door and pressed his ear to the crack. He heard her say, in a low, husky tone:

"No, there's something wrong. A slip somewhere. Tavelli . . . is . . ." Her voice dropped so low then that Kessler couldn't catch the words. A moment

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later she said, a trifle louder, "Watch your step, Dan. There's that damned dog, you know. . . ." Then the receiver clicked into place.

Kessler swung round, face a chiseled mask.

Dilke's slow, heavy steps were approaching the door. He stepped across and entered the dining room. There was nothing to indicate his feelings as he genially passed the Russian cigarettes. Dilke entered very shortly after with the dessert.

Ellen left almost at once, going to her room. She patently was not wanted. It was nine o'clock—too early for bed. Mechanically she changed into the tweed skirt and rumpled blouse. Those others down below had business—strange business.

An almost overwhelming curiosity danced in her eyes, sent a flush to her cheeks. The mysterious Mr. Tavelli was an intriguing person. Men who could park savage attackers in haystacks and casually fill dinner engagements were unusual, to say the least. She had thrilled to his dynamic touch.

Her heart thumped at her ribs. She fought a desire to slip down the stairs and listen at the keyhole. Scornful words rang in her ears, Kessler speaking behind the living room panels: "She's just a little featherweight, believes in Santa Claus—" Her cheeks burned angrily. Pigeon-holed till morning, was she? Maybe so—maybe not.

Suddenly over the drum of the rain sounded again that savage baying of the chained Kato! She gasped, backing swiftly toward the bed. What a horrible beast and why was he kept, chained or otherwise? A watch dog, of course. Just now he was signaling the approach of an intruder.

She snapped off the light, ran to the window, pulled the curtains. Blackness greeted her. Rain poured down the panes. The tall trees swayed before the wind. Kato kept up his thunderous howling. Downstairs a door closed. Feet crossed the hall. She heard Kessler say, "See what's the matter with that damned hound?" and the outer door banged behind him. She heard him tramping across the porch.

He seemed gone a long time. Ellen was standing at the stair head when he entered, his face flushed and angry, water sluicing from his raincoat. He slapped his hat to a hook, jerked off the coat and went into the living room.

Ellen sighed, eased down a step or two and peered inquisitively through the transom glass into the room. Firelight glinted on the walls. She could see Paget's sleek black head where he sat on the divan by the table. Mrs. Kessler's lovely s n o w y back was toward her. Louis Tavelli stood just behind the divan. His face was in shadow, but Ellen caught his queer quirky smile. As if he enjoyed a tremendous joke all by himself.

Kessler came into her line of vision. His face looked apoplectic. He was talking, but she could not hear him, of course. There was no denying his angry insistence. The sullen displeasure of his wife and Paget. Only Tavelli seemed to be enjoying himself.

Ralph Kessler jerked a brown leather sack from his side pocket, fumbled with the strings a moment while the others leaned forward tensely. Then onto the table he spilled an unbelievable glittering mass of jewels! They slithered out, forming a heap of mingled flame on the table's center.

ELLEN, frozen to the stair rail, caught the blue-white brilliance of diamonds. The blood red of rubies. The moonlight luster of price-

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less pearls. The green glory of emeralds. Breath sucked between her teeth. Unconsciously she crouched down, fascinated glance on that little pyramid of wealth.

No one was moving in the room. She got the feel of utter motionlessness about the group. As if they, too, were spellbound by what Kessler displayed.

Then a hand came out. A strong, handsome hand, with long, spatulate fingers. Tavelli's. He lifted a pearl rope, held it, head on one side, studying it. He let it fall, picked up a necklace of emeralds. Kessler's head started bobbing eagerly. She could see his thick lips moving. The emeralds slithered through Tavelli's fingers.

On the wings of the stormy wind came Kato's howl! Ellen choked a scream, started up, collapsed weakly as a heavy hand fell on her shoulder. She lifted her head, saw Mrs. Dilke's gleaming mahogany face above her, the lips grim set, the black eyes dangerous. The dog kept up his unearthly racket. Ellen heard quite plainly Mrs. Dilke's hurried, uneven breathing, saw drops of moisture on her long, upper lip.

"What are you doing here?"

Ellen's dry tongue clicked against her teeth. "Nothing. Just got lonely in my room, thought I'd come down—"

Dilke grunted. Her grip tightened until Ellen's lips whitened with pain. Then the woman turned her as she might have turned a chair, marched her along the hall and back to her own room. She shoved her inside, entered after her, closing the door and leaning against it. Ellen brought up against the table, panting.

Dilke said, in her deadly monotonous voice, "You're a little fool. Snooping into what does not concern you."

"I didn't snoop," Ellen gasped. "I didn't mean—"

Dilke smiled. It was infinitely more terrifying than her normal expressionless mask. "Stay in your room!" she ordered. "Get into bed and go to sleep and at the first crack of dawn get free of this house and be thankful for the chance." She glanced down at the key in the lock. Deliberately she withdrew it, opened the door and slid through into the hall. "Take my advice," she said very low, "and don't try to get out. I'll see to it that you don't." She nodded definitely. "I don't want your blood on my head." She inserted the key in the lock on the outside, closed the door and locked it.

Ellen's wide, horrified eyes clung to the smooth panels of the locked door, and she heard Dilke's heavy steps retreating along the shadowy corridor. She realized that Kato had stopped his clamor. The silence was worse.

For a long moment she did not stir. There was an uncomfortable dryness in her throat. Her heart pounded furiously. She turned, letting her strained eyes travel over the room. Its comfortable chairs, its pleasant, faded rugs. The bright fire.

She smiled faintly, breathing the one word, "Featherweight," through suddenly taut lips. Then, crossing to the table, she picked up her small handbag; fingering through its contents, she produced a slim key. She went to the door, slipped it into the lock, worked gently. It clicked. The door opened easily.

She glanced through the narrow crack into the deserted hall. Curtains moved over the window at the far end. Shadows chased along the somber walls. From downstairs she heard the rumble of voices. Irene's sudden high laugh.

Just then she saw Dilke. On a quick breath, Ellen narrowed the crack in the doorway, snapped the wall switch.

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The old woman was advancing along the hall on the other side of the staircase. Suddenly a door opened. A man stepped out, almost directly in Dilke's path. She jerked up, backed, hand flashing to her lips. The light from the shaded floor lamp at the stair head touched her face. The mahogany had paled to a thin tan.

Ellen did not recognize the man, standing as he did in the shadows outside the closed door. He said something very low. Dilke's hands fell. She nodded. The man opened the door against which he leaned, disappeared. Dilke stood hesitantly, eyes flashing over the somber hall, then followed. The door clicked shut.

ELLEN flashed into the hall, running on soundless feet across the lighted space of the stair well, past the doors where the two had vanished. Once there, panic seized her. There was no place to hide. They might come out any moment. She caught the low, cautious murmur of their voices. Trembling, she stared around. There were closed doors on both sides of the hall. On impulse she tried the one directly opposite. It opened easily. She darted in, closing it all but the tiniest crack. There was the odor of leather, whisky and stale tobacco. A man's room. Kessler's or Paget's.

Downstairs the living room door opened. Voices sounded clearly. It closed again. A man started upstairs. Ellen's heart slowed, whipped to a furious pounding. She heard an aimless whistling as the quick, nervous steps mounted. Paget! And it would be just her luck to be in his room. Her fingers ached around the door's edge. She couldn't escape now. She would be directly in his line of vision. She struggled frantically for an explanation. Could she say she had become confused and entered the wrong room? Ridiculous!

Then the door opposite opened. A man stepped into the hall. Louis Tavelli. He swung round the banister, came face to face with Paget. He said, "Oh, I nearly ran you down, didn't I?" and paused, a smile tugging his lips. "Figure I was lost?" he asked.

Paget's smile was white in the shadows. "Kessler thought you might have run into difficulties. Rambling old place, you know."

"Seems to be," Tavelli agreed. He loomed large and black against the light from below. Muscles bulged beneath his well-tailored coat. There was a strong, aggressive set to his head, his out-thrust jaw.

"Come down and we'll get the business over," he suggested.

Paget said nothing. Ellen's heart was a fluttering thing in her throat for what seemed an eternity of time, then Paget said, "Okay," and ran down the stairs, Tavelli following. The living room door closed behind them.

Ellen gave a little sob and let her head fall forward on her clenched hands. Oh, what a fool she was! What an unutterable fool! It occurred to her that if, following Dilke's advice, she ever did win free of this horrible house—

The door opposite opened. Dilke's long, brown face appeared. Then, like a shadow, she emerged, padded down the hall, vanished.

Ellen gasped with relief, tugging at the door knob.

Behind her in the darkness something stirred! A dull, lifeless rustling sound, like a huge snake turning! There was an anguished moan! And straight on the heels of it Kato's baying lifted threateningly over the wind.

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Ellen stood so still she might have been part of the door. So still when her heart was literally tearing her slim body to pieces. She thought, "Someone —some thing—is here in the room with me! Something—"

The moaning sounded again. Died. Her hand fumbled the pocket of her tweed skirt, came out holding a pencil flash. She deliberately closed the door, extended her hand as far as she could to the right, and snapped the button.

The narrow beam of light sliced the darkness. For a moment Ellen could distinguish nothing, then she saw the corner of a dresser, a chair that had the look of being hastily pushed aside, the bed, smooth and unrumpled, pictures—a gun in the corner. Slowly, thoughtfully, the little light went over the room, picking out objects, classifying them. Everything all right. Just the ordinary furniture of an ordinary bedroom. Only it wasn't an ordinary room. In it something had stirred like a great snake. Something that might have been human had moaned.

Silence beat against her ear drums. She could feel her body jerk with the furious pounding of her heart, as slowly, carefully the light circled, lifted, dropped, hesitated, stopped on a dark gleaming pool that had gathered on the smooth shining floor boards just outside a closed door.

"Oh!" Ellen inhaled softly. "Oh!" and flashed across the room, bending down to examine it. Her eyes lifted, studying the door. Her hand went out, touched the knob, fell, gathered up the folds of her skirt and lifted again. With the knob grasped firmly through the wool, she stopped again. Every instinct fought against the opening of that door. She longed desperately to run from the room, from the house, into the cold, wet night, along the soggy, wretched road, run, run, far beyond the sound of Irene's laughter, the rumble of Kessler's voice, the baying of that beastly dog.

SHE turned the knob. The door opened. She shot the light inside. A small storeroom, utilized as a closet. Suits hung in orderly rows. There was a handsome wardrobe trunk, an expensive Gladstone. High, mud-stained boots.

She leaned inside, shooting the light into the dusky cavern behind the clothes. Her eyes widened. A man sprawled there on hastily folded blankets. He wore a fine, white shirt open at the throat, the button torn and dangling. His dark gray trousers and expensive oxfords were soggy with mud. His eyes were closed. His thin, lined face gray and ghastly. He had heavy black hair, matted and clogged with blood. There was blood on his hand where it had torn at the front of his shirt. Blood ran in a lazy trickle across the floor, to form that ugly stain outside. Yet the man was not dead.

As Ellen stared, speechless, he whispered and twitched.

"Tavelli!" he mumbled. "Louis Tavelli—"

The words died into incoherent muttering. He relaxed and lay still. For what seemed a long time, Ellen Conway studied him, then very quietly she stepped back, closed the door, crossed the room and went into the hall. It was deserted.

She took a quick look around and raced to her own room. Terror clutched at her heels, made a long tenuous shadow behind her. She had suddenly a frantic desire to gain the shelter and sanctuary of that pleasant fire-lighted room where she could at least pretend to be safe. The necessity of a few

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moments' coherent thought urged her on. The corridor seemed to stretch endlessly before her. Closed doors, like shut, yet seeing eyes, watched her frantic progress.

She reached it at last, grasped the knob, leaned weakly against the panels. Then, with a little gasp of complete dismay, she straightened. The door was locked! The key, of course, was missing. Her own skeleton key she had left inside the room. She was locked out. Left, alone and helpless, before whatever strange forces moved in the old dark house this night.

For a little time she stood there, mind whirling with conflicting thoughts, darting frantically toward some solution as to who had locked her door. As to why—

She nodded at last, her mind made up. She would simply walk downstairs, explain her predicament. Her narrowed eyes swept the hall. She had gone to the bathroom, left the door ajar, it had blown shut, the lock was set—

She shook her head impatiently. The bath connected with her own room. There was no Yale lock on the door. It wouldn't do. There wasn't any explanation except to say, "I was out poking around into what didn't concern me. I was eavesdropping on conversations not intended for my ears. I was hiding in someone's room. I found a wounded man in the closet—"

She shut her teeth hard to keep them from chattering. Where should she go? What should she do? If only there was some reasonably intelligent explanation she could give them as to how she happened to be out of her room. Doubtless they all knew that Dilke had locked her in. The very fact that she was out would have to be explained. She closed her eyes a moment, then Kato howled dolorously. She shuddered backward, hands instinctively pressed against her ears. There was something stark and primitive in the sound, a force of terror to guard the walled grounds of the old dark house. She tried to vision what sort of a brute he would be. Saw him with swinging head, dripping jowls, small, red-rimmed eyes, mighty shoulders. Why did he howl tonight? What was it moving through the rainy dark that kept Kato eternally sending up his ominous warning?

She lifted her head, lips suddenly determined. She had reached a quick decision. Head up, eyes alert, she started swiftly down the hall toward the stair head.

CHAPTER IV

Murder in Haste—

SUSAN DILKE sat before the glowing range in the kitchen, work done, kitchen swept and garnished. There was nothing to keep Susan from mounting the stairs to the third floor cubby she called home, removing her stiff garments and going to bed. But though the noisy clock on the shelf above the stove had pointed to midnight, Susan still sat tense and unwearying, staring at the kitchen door.

It was of heavy, rather rough wood, painted white. There was the black square of a window, partially screened by half-drawn curtains, forming a diamond-shaped opening. Against this the rain poured in shining torrents.

Susan sat very straight in an uncomfortable wooden chair. Her large feet were planted firmly on the floor under the edge of the range. Her sparse gray hair shone like metal in the light. The clock ticked noisily.

She glanced at it now and then, and

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fear flecked briefly in the depths of her brilliant eyes. Twice during her vigil she had stolen to the end of the hall and listened to the low murmur of voices in the living room. Words she could not catch. Susan did not particularly care what was being discussed in there, however. Her faculties were terribly concentrated on something else, something which was obviously of vital importance to her.

A creaking board on the porch made her start, eyes stretched wide on the shining blackness of the uncurtained triangle. Something moved before it, like a spray of mist blown by the wind. Susan stood upright in one lithe movement, glanced quickly over her shoulder at the closed swinging door to the hall, crossed over to the outside door.

Soundlessly she opened it. Rain spattered in. She gulped at the force of the wind, leaned out, calling softly, "Dan! Dan! You there?"

Nothing at first save the lashing of the trees, then a low, furtive voice answered, "Yeah. Come 'ere."

Susan looked back again at the bland quietness of the shining kitchen, slipped outside, closing the door softly behind her. She did not stay more than three minutes. The man named Dan, a rough, uncouth figure, mumbled under his breath and slouched down the steps and into the rain again. Susan stared after him, grim face all broken and working.

"Dan," she called hoarsely. "Oh, Danny boy—"

"Pipe down," his voice ground through the dark. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Susan said on what sounded strangely like a sob, "only be careful, Danny boy, be careful—"

A mumbled reply came out of the rain, feet crunched on the wet gravel.

Susan returned to the kitchen. Rain blurred her glasses. Moisture streamed into her eyes. The room was a blur of light, with the glistening pans and the ruddy range. She heard water singing as the kettle boiled gaily. It had a comforting sound, at wide variance with the black night outside. It reached through Susan's troubled preoccupation with a friendly insistence. She lifted her head, frowned at the kettle on the stove.

"An old woman like myself," she muttered, "should be tending her own kettle, with her grandchildren playing around her knee. An old woman like myself—"

"Dilke!"

Her head lifted. Breath sucked between her strong white teeth. Sweat gleamed suddenly on her forehead. She blinked moisture from her eyes, peered into the shadows by the swinging door.

"Yes?" she questioned thickly.

Ralph Kessler strolled into the kitchen. His little bright eyes bored into her like diamond drills.

"Bad night to be outside, Dilke," he said softly, and she saw his hand working at his side.

Susan's glance did not waver, but her fingers clenched in the folds of her black skirt. She said, "Yes, sir. It's a rare bad night."

Kessler came toward her, smiling. She heard him breathing in long, slow cadence, but she saw also how the muscle twitched in his thick neck. She backed unconsciously before his advance.

"It's a bad night, too," Kessler said gently, "to be using the telephone, Dilke. You thought we were all busy in the dining room, didn't you?" He watched with cruel enjoyment how the color drained out of her face. He laughed a little. "You've been careless, Dilke, very careless."

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HE had kept one hand behind him. It came forward now, and her lips opened, but no sound came. "So careless," Kessler repeated, and like light his hand lifted, holding a thin-bladed knife by the extreme tip of the blade.

Susan saw it coming, tried to dodge. It swished through the air like a bright bird, arcing beautifully, finding its mark with deadly precision. The mark was Susan Dilke's gaunt corded throat. The knife sliced into it, quivered, held. Her eyes went wide with astonished agony. Her head jerked back. Her great hands lifted, fumbled futilely at the table, fell. For a moment she swayed there against the wall, staring at the ceiling with eyes that were slowly losing their brilliance, then she slipped down and lay in a crumpled heap of starched black muslin, her little white apron twisted by the strong agony of her writhing hands. Blood, which had spurted at the knife thrust, began welling quietly in a dark red stream, creeping over the white tie at her throat, puddling wetly on the clean floor boards.

Ralph Kessler wiped his fingers delicately on a fresh linen handkerchief. His eyes went in a quick, venomous flash over the quiet room, lingered a moment on the black diamond of the door. Then he crossed over, shoved aside a small table, bent down and, inserting a thick finger in the flat iron ring, lifted a trapdoor. Cold, musty air rushed up. There was a furtive rustling and scratching from the blackness below.

Breathing hard, Kessler seized the old woman's shoulders, dragged her inert body to the opening and unceremoniously tumbled it onto the stairs. Then he carefully lowered the door and replaced the table. Sweat was running down his face. He mopped it away, impatiently, his eyes narrowed on the telltale stain on the floor boards.

There was a small bright rug just before the range. He seized it, spread it over the spot, stood back regarding it thoughtfully.

A sound made him lift his head. The swinging door had opened. Louis Tavelli appeared.

"Hello," he said, "we've been wondering where you went." He stepped through, cigarette smoldering between his fingers.

Kessler smiled, shrugged. "Thought I'd have Dilke make us some coffee," he explained. "But I guess the old woman's turned in." His glance went carelessly over the kitchen.

Tavelli's eyes, behind the glasses, followed that glance, noted the pushed-back chair, the table angling out of square. He shrugged slightly. "A shot of Scotch could do the trick. Need you wake her?"

Kessler's head lifted slowly. For a moment color was gone from his heavy face, leaving it grayish white, mottled, repulsive. His eyes bulged. He shivered, wet his lips, laughed with unnatural loudness.

"No," he said, "I won't waken her. Let her sleep. Let the old woman sleep."

He crossed to the swinging door. Tavelli stood aside to let him pass. Before he followed his eyes again took in the details of the kitchen, lingering on the small, bright rug which lay in such a peculiar place, over there to the right of the door, out from the wall a couple of feet. Odd place for a rug. Odd rug for that matter. There seemed to be a dark design on top of the small, bright one. A blurred outline, that appeared, doubtless a trick of the light, to glisten moistily.

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He went after Kessler along the window hall, moving swiftly on sure, silent feet.

TWENTY minutes later, Louis Tavelli rose from his seat by the table in the living room. The gorgeous collection of jewels was still glittering there. Tavelli's face was grim as his eyes lifted from contemplation of them, circled slowly over the three people before him. He shoved his hands into his pockets.

"That's my figure," he said sharply. "Take it or leave it."

Kessler's heavy face went purple. "It's a damned outrage, Tavelli. It's not a tenth of what they're worth."

Tavelli stated calmly, "It's fifty per cent more than you'd get from an ordinary fence."

Paget said angrily, "It's a hell of a deal, if you ask me. Why do you think we've stalled around, holding the damned things for six months just to get in touch with you, Tavelli?"

"That's easy," Tavelli replied coolly. "Because you know that I pay higher prices, ask fewer questions and take more chances than anyone else."

"There's nothing been said tonight to indicate it," Kessler snarled.

Tavelli shrugged. "I've offered all I can consistently. They'll be watered stock for at least a year. They're hot, and smell of the morgue. Too bad it was necessary to iron old Vanderfelt on the 'lift.' It soured the 'sugar.'"

"And makes pikers out of us," Kessler said savagely.

Tavelli smiled thinly, spreading his hands. "Twenty-five grand. Take it or leave it."

Silence beat heavily.

"Bring the loose change with you, Tavelli?" Kessler asked, voice suddenly quiet.

Tavelli lifted brows. "What's your guess, Kessler?"

"Maybe you'd like to know," Kessler, leaning forward, tattooed the smooth oaken table surface with thick fingertips.

The tenseness in the smoke-filled air had grown suddenly acute.

"What—" shrilled Irene, but her husband lifted a hand. His small eyes clashed Tavelli's leveled glance. His tones stayed low, deceptively soft. "Maybe you're on the up and up, Mr. Tavelli, but I think you're a damned impostor!"

Irene gasped faintly and sank back, face paper white. Paget jerked to his feet. "Kessler! You're nuts!"

Tavelli remained at ease, but his face went chisel hard and the eyelids drooped.

He spoke evenly. "Yes, you are a fool, a damned fool, if I may say so—but it's interesting. Continue."

Red mottled Kessler's face and he lurched forward. Suddenly regaining control of himself, however, he relaxed, even managing a crooked smile.

"The picture suggests possibilities," he gritted. "A man whom we've never seen arrives under damn strange circumstances, announcing himself as Tavelli—the man we're expecting. Now I suggest you prove that identity before we go further."

"What the hell—" snapped Paget, but Kessler quieted him with a vise-like pressure on his arm.

"I may add," continued Kessler, still holding Tavelli's eyes, "your piker offer for a hundred and fifty grand in rocks doesn't sound like—Tavelli."

Tavelli straightened, speaking pleasantly enough. "I've papers, driver's license—but, of course—"

"Not worth a damn," Kessler said. "If you waylaid the real Tavelli, as I

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think you did, you'd cop his stuff. Still you might have something, say, in your briefcase—" His small eyes darted sidewise at Irene, jerked back; they were blank as marbles.

"By George, I have! Wait a minute. I'll run along and get it." Tavelli crossed toward the stairs, then turned. "Perhaps you'd like to come along, Kessler. I might—"

"Oh, no, you won't," Kessler affirmed grimly. "Try skippin' and we'll *know* you're phony."

Tavelli shrugged, turned and ran lightly up the steps.

After a moment Paget said, "You're nuts, Kessler. You've made the guy sore now. The biggest, slickest fence in the States. You had him here all ready to bite on this bunch of swag"—he motioned to the table—"and then you go get your neck feathers ruffled—"

"Shut up," Kessler rapped. "I'm running this show. Think I'd take a lousy twenty-five grand for this ice after all the build-up?"

"Then why the hocus-pocus of sending him upstairs for identification?"

KESSLER'S narrowed eyes filmed. "So we can take him when he starts back down. If the guy's a phony he's got it comin' to him. If he's really Tavelli, stickin' on the thumbscrews, well, that goes for him, too." He nodded his big head. "We'll have the ice—and the gravy," he added.

Paget said through suddenly white lips, "You mean—"

"Sap him?" gasped Irene.

"Count me out," Paget kicked over his chair and swung toward the fireplace. He pivoted, tromping back.

"Welcher, eh?" Kessler's face went purple with rage. "Well, you're takin' this trick with Irene and me or else—" He was slowly rising to his feet.

Paget stood wide-legged, hands resting lightly in his pockets. "You're a damned fool, Kessler," he said clearly, "and a detriment to the combination. Irene and I could do a hell of a lot better without you."

"What?" Kessler lurched forward, over the table, struggling for speech. "You dirty swine!" he choked. "You—you and Irene—"

Paget's hand jerked up, vising a gat. He shoved it against Kessler, squeezed the trigger. There was a dull plop. Kessler grunted, whirled round, clutching at his thick chest. He took half a dozen stumbling steps, body bent forward grotesquely, then he collapsed and lay twitching on the rug. Paget returned the gun to his pocket.

Irene Kessler gave a low, whimpering cry and closed her eyes. Paget did not look at her. He looked at the dead man on the rug. He said jerkily, "You didn't like postponing our plans, Irene. Well—we—haven't—"

She cried thinly, "Oh, Vance, get him out of the way. Get him some place. I can see his eyes—his eyes—" Her voice rose to a shrill scream. Paget clapped a hand brutally across her mouth.

"Shut up," he ordered, rounded the table, seized Kessler's limp body, dragged it across, rolled it into a corner and pulled the divan around to cover it.

"We'll tell Tavelli he's gone out to examine the car, see? We'll put through the deal in a hurry, collect the cash and scram." He straightened, mopping sweat from his face. "It isn't the way we planned it—cruder somehow—but sometimes that's the best. We can get out of here in a hurry, hit the Canadian border before daylight—"

"The girl!" Irene said gaspingly. "That—damned girl!"

Paget stopped with the suddenness

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of completely arrested motion. For a moment his face was blank as plaster. "Girl?" he repeated dully. "Girl?"

Irene was fumbling with the cloth of her skirt. She said, through stiff lips, "I locked her door when she was out."

"You what?"

"I didn't trust her. I saw Dilke lock her in. Later I tried the door. It was unlocked; the girl was gone—so I locked it and took the key—"

Paget said slowly, "Why did you do that?"

Irene clawed at her throat. "I thought it would prove something. If she were straight—I figured she'd come down and tell us she was locked out, explain where she'd been. If she didn't say anything—"

"How long ago?"

"Oh, two hours—or more—"

"And she hasn't shown up? Where is she?"

"I don't know—" Panic twitched Irene's slim body. "Oh, how should I know? I'd forgotten her—"

Paget lunged for the door. "I'll have to find her. She's loose somewhere in the house. She may be—"

The door slammed behind him. Irene sat motionless, staring with sunken eyes at the gleaming heap of jewels on the table. Rain sluiced against the windows. Kato howled a long, doleful cadence.

Irene's glance jerked to the divan, standing so innocently in the corner. She could not look away. She thought that any moment it would move, as Ralph Kessler rose, pushed it aside, came walking toward her, hands outstretched toward her throat. She cowered back, hands pressed across her lips. Terror mounted round her like a rising tide, lapped her in black waters of complete despair. She was alone with the dead, and the dead was moving! The dead was walking toward her.

She staggered to her feet, took two swaying, uncertain steps, slipped senseless to the rug, lay there without stirring.

CHAPTER V

Partnership

LOUIS TAVELLI opened his door softly, snapped on the light. His eyes went over the room in a swift, comprehensive survey, stopped on the top of a brown head showing above the back of a chair by the fire. He stiffened. His hand went toward his side pocket.

Ellen Conway rose, faced him. Tavelli stepped inside, closed the door. They looked at each other.

He said, "What the devil?"

She tried to reply, but her trembling lips only jerked spasmodically. He came to her side. His eyes were hard as slate. "Well?" he ordered. "What are you doing here?"

"There wasn't any other place to go. They locked me out."

"Locked you out? Out of what?"

"My room."

"Why?"

"I—don't—know."

His hard eyes raked her face. She looked haggard, spent. There was a spot of blood on her under lips where her teeth had gouged it. Deep blue circles beneath her eyes.

He said very low, "Who are you?"

Her direct gaze did not waver. "Ellen Conway, State Department of Education," she pattered.

He grunted. "Of course."

Silence for a moment, then she said slowly, "Who—who are you?"

He smiled bleakly. "Louis Tavelli—of course."

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"Of course," she agreed tonelessly. After a moment she said, a bit faintly, "Coming to bed, were you?"

He laughed shortly, "Hardly. I'm after proofs to convince the folks downstairs that I am—Louis Tavelli."

"Oh!" She leaned back on the chair. "Well, go ahead and get them."

"That's the riddle," he told her. "I haven't any."

"Oh. Well, that's scarcely to be expected."

His lips sucked in. Sweat gleamed on his forehead. "Smart girl, aren't you, darling?"

"Not very, sweetheart, but I do happen to know Louis Tavelli by sight."

"Yes? Not very many claim that distinction."

"I know. I happen to be one of the few."

"This was in the interest of public education?"

Her eyes were as hard as his own. "In a way, yes. The public could stand some education about Mr. Tavelli. But you see, I do know him, and when I heard he was coming tonight—"

"I see," he interrupted. "You invented a bad headache, to avoid coming down for dinner. Then when you saw me in the hall—"

"Exactly. I knew you were an impostor," she smiled very faintly.

He watched her intently, the pupils of his eyes black points of intense concentration. Downstairs a door slammed, but neither noticed.

She continued, "For your information, the real Louis Tavelli is at this moment stuffed back in a closet of that room opposite—with a bullet wound in his chest."

"The devil!" The ejaculation twisted a smile to her lips.

"Paget's room, I suppose."

"No, Kessler's." His eyes flicked over the room, returned to her. "So that's how Kessler guessed," he muttered. "Why he demanded proofs. But how the devil— Look. You saw the fight in the lane?"

She nodded. "And heard the shots—"

"That was Tavelli plugging at me when I was grabbin' him," he stated. "I 'jacked him over the ear and trucked him a mile or so down the road, sticking him under a culvert—"

"He must have come back," she supplemented, "prowling around the place. Who shot him?"

"I don't know. Kessler, maybe, when he went out to see about the dog. He was gone a long time. He most likely plugged Tavelli, stashed him in his room until—"

"Kessler killed Dilke," Ellen said.

She backed before the sudden unleashed fury in the man's eyes. "Dilke?" he whispered. "Kessler killed her?"

"Yes. I was at the end of the hall. I saw him go into the kitchen. I watched through a crack in the door. I left just before you came. Oh, I shouldn't have told you—"

HE said through his teeth, "I've got to know. We're in a spot. You won't tell me why you're here?"

"Sure, making a survey. You came for the Vanderfelt gems, I suppose?"

"Good guesser, baby, and I'm afraid I'm upsetting a little plant of your own."

She smiled enigmatically. "Possibly. What's the chance for the ice?"

"Damned slim just now." Again he studied the room. "Kessler's wise; my only chance now is to get the drop on him—"

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"There are two others," she reminded him.

"I know." He scowled, plucking at his under lip. Quickly his eyes jerked to her. "We might as well team up," he suggested. "It's our only chance. How about it?"

She considered. "Say we cop the ice—what's the split?"

He grinned, not very mirthfully. "All business, aren't you, sweetheart?"

Her red lips hardened. "Every ounce of me, big man."

"How's seventy-five, twenty-five when the stones are fenced?"

"That's okay," she agreed. "Seventy-five to me, twenty-five—"

He laughed. "Skip it, Ellen. I've gone to a lot of trouble to frame this set-up."

"It wasn't handed to me on a silver platter. Make it fifty-fifty or I won't play."

His head turned, as running feet sounded in the corridor. The man and girl stood very still until they had died away, then he nodded. "All right, call it fifty-fifty. Shake." He extended his hand. She hesitated just a moment, slipped her own inside, felt the strong, vital fingers close firmly with a strange gentleness which changed abruptly to a cruel pressure, as his eyes bored into her.

"Oh," she gasped, "you're hurting me."

He grinned mirthlessly. "Serves you right for being mixed up with such a lousy racket, nice kid like you."

Hot color flooded her cheeks. Angrily, she jerked her hand free. Her polished nails bit through the firm flesh of his palm. He cursed softly. "Little cat! You scratched me."

"Good enough for you, being nothing better than a common thug, a big, fine man like you."

They stared at each other, eyes hostile, wary, somehow hurt. She said,

"Take off those beastly cheaters. Everyone knows you're not Tavelli now."

He hesitated a moment, removed the glasses. His dark gray eyes were bloodshot from the strain of the lenses. He blinked rapidly. "That better?"

"Yes. Thank you. Now what?"

"I've got a pal working this set-up with me."

She frowned. "Yes? Well, don't figure on changing the per cent; I'm on my own."

He said impatiently, "Can't you forget the money angle for a moment? We're in a spot. My pal, Dan, is loose somewhere in the grounds tonight—"

"Oh. That's what's been annoying that devilish dog?"

"Probably, along with Tavelli's coming." He brushed heavy hair from his forehead. "You see, Mother Dilke was giving Dan and me a lift—"

Again she said, "Oh," slowly, eyes narrowed on his face. "And Kessler got wise and killed her."

"So you say. Damn him! The point is, I had a brief conference with Dilke in this room tonight—"

"I know you did. I watched from across the hall. That's how I discovered Tavelli."

He seized her wrist, jerked her close. His eyes were like sleet. "You damned little snoop! You learned—"

She was puzzled by the ferocity of his gaze, as she shook her head slowly. "Not a word. Get on with the plotting. We can't stay here all night. Odd they haven't been up to check on you, isn't it?"

His strong black brows bit down in a frown. "It is. The dump's quiet as the grave."

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She shivered, thinking of Mother Dilke, wondering if the trapdoor in the kitchen were lifted—her large flat feet would be staring up, curiously, like great leather eyes.

"Now get this," he stated. "Dan's around outside. You find him. Take this flash—"

"I have a flash, thank you. I'm to find Dan. Then what?"

"Give him the office to get in here in a hurry. He's sudden death with a gat. We can take care of the three of them, Dan and I."

"Count me in on the finish," she instructed him coolly, and opened her hand, showing a small, mean-looking automatic.

HE scowled at the gun. "Okay, but we'll still want Dan. You'll need a coat. Here, take mine." He jerked up a light-weight silk-rubber raincoat from a chair, held it out. She slipped into it. It enveloped her coldly. Through the coldness she could feel the strong warmth of his arms. For just a breath she relaxed, stood very still, and he did not stir, then she slipped away, pausing before the door at his low call.

"Dan might shoot first and argue afterward," he said grimly. "Better take this." He drew something from an inner pocket, pressed it into her hand. She felt cold metal, glanced at it. A small bronze button, with something engraved on it. "Flash this with my S. O. S. I'm going downstairs, stall 'em along till you get back. If you hear shooting come on the double. Got it?"

"Check."

"Dan won't be far, nor missing anything."

She opened the door, glanced out. The hall was dim and deserted. She slipped out, hesitated. There was something dull and heavy where her heart should have been.

Stubbornly she started to close the door, felt a hand on her shoulder, looked up to see the man's lean, hard face just above her. His eyes were still showing the effect of the punishing glasses, of course, which made them look rather dim, almost misty. He smiled that queer one-sided smile, said very softly, "Good luck, Ellen."

She blinked uncertainly, smiled back, so that all the harshness went out of her face. And she looked the kind of girl who belonged in a dress of peach blow taffeta, sprayed with innocent-looking rosebuds.

"Thanks—Jack," she said. "The same to you."

Jack, who had impersonated Louis Tavelli, the cleverest fence in the States, watched Ellen through his partially open door until she had disappeared at the end of the hall. Smart girl. She was going down the rear stairs and out the back way. He grinned thinly, shrugged. Smart girl? He wondered. He went back into the room, drew out his heavy automatic, examined it, slipped extra cartridges into his side pocket and went into the hall. The place was silent. He stood there a moment, listening to the silence, then headed for the stairs.

"Tavelli!" The low, tense tones brought him up sharply.

Vance Paget was coming along the hall, not, the other noted with relief, from the direction in which Ellen had gone.

"Yes?" Tavelli waited, hand in his pocket, head lowered a little.

Paget's face was gray-white, marked with sweat. His thick, glossy hair was rumpled, his eyes furtive. He said thickly, "That damned jane! Where is she?"

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Tavelli's brows lifted. "Jane?"

"Oh, don't play dumb," Paget rapped. "I mean that Conway frail. She's on the loose somewhere in the house. We've got to find her. There's something screwy about her, damn it! Irene got suspicious, locked her out of her room—"

"Well, why bother about her now? She can't do any harm."

His words were silenced by a sudden shrill scream. It came from the direction of the living room, high, clear, terror-filled. Hard on it Kato's savage challenge rose, so that the woman's voice blended weirdly with the howl of the beast, forming an unearthly duet.

"Irene!" Paget cried. "That's Irene's voice!" He plunged down the stairs, Tavelli at his heels. Paget threw open the living room door, surged in, dilated eyes flashing across to the divan. It was still in place. Then he looked at the woman. She was standing up, steadying herself by a chair back. Her face was dough-white, eyes sunken, crimson lips twitching. She did not look at the two men. Her fascinated gaze clung to the table. She kept on screaming in short staccato bursts as if she could never stop.

"Irene!" Paget cried. "Irene!"

She stopped her clamor, lifted her head like one waking from a dream. "Vance," she whimpered. "Look! There at the table. They're gone, do you see? The stones are gone!"

Paget's curse was smothered in a quick, dismayed exclamation. He stared at the table. Its surface was swept clean. Where had rested a fortune in precious stones now was only a dusty, marred expanse of wood, gleaming dully under the light.

He tried to speak, but his stiff lips would not form words. The man they had known as Tavelli stepped forward, face like granite. "Who took them?" he rapped.

Irene turned slowly to look at him, blinking dully. She said, "That damned Conway girl. I had—had—fallen asleep. Something roused me. I saw her stuffing them in the sack. She was out of the door before I could move."

Paget whirled on the man they had known as Tavelli. "Now will you insist the girl is jake? She's fanned the ice. Kessler—"

"Where is Kessler?" Tavelli asked gently. "How do you know, Paget, that it wasn't really Kessler who copped the swag?"

Irene began laughing, head thrown back, light glinting on her gorgeous hair. "No, no," she choked. "It wasn't Kessler. Kessler didn't do it. Kessler couldn't—"

Paget gave her a quick shove. She collapsed into the chair, still laughing hysterically. "Kessler didn't do it," he agreed, and like a flash he had turned, an automatic suddenly in his hand, levelled, steady.

"Quiet, guy!" he gritted. "I begin to see now. You and the jane were working together. It was all part of the plant." He drew a long, slow breath. "Well, you'll never live to enjoy them. Get that girl back here in one hell of a hurry or"—his finger twitched suggestively around the trigger—"it's curtains. Long, dark curtains."

CHAPTER VI

Showdown

ELLEN ran blindly through the black rain. Ran until her heart was a stabbing agony and breath labored through her set teeth. With unerring instinct she avoided the trees,

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ducked aside from low clumps of shrubbery that might have tripped her. She hadn't even thought of her coupé —useless, anyhow, as Paget had failed to return the keys. Her mind kept pace with her flying feet.

"Reach the gate—get on the road—out of those beastly grounds—" Some tourist on the detour might pick her up. "Dan! He said to call Dan!" She laughed gaspingly. "Like hell!" ran her tormented thoughts. "Let him die. Let them finish him. What do I care? He's just a lousy heel. A chiseler. Why should I care what happens to him?"

Dead grasses clutched at her feet. Wet boughs slapped against her cold face. "He gave me his raincoat." She was conscious of its warmth around her like the man's arms in that one vivid, unforgettable moment. "Why should I care what happens to him? They'll kill him likely. He's their kind. The world's better without him." She saw his eyes in the darkness before her. Level, direct, gray eyes, hard as sleet sometimes; softening to queer laughter; blinking from the strain of Tavelli's glasses. In the wind soughing through the great trees she heard his voice: "Good luck, Ellen."

Instinct wavered before the terrible weariness that gripped her. She collided with a tree trunk, slumped down sobbing on the wet ground.

"Dan," she whispered brokenly. "I've got to find Dan."

She huddled there, sobbing angrily. "You're a damned fool, what's the man to you? What's honor among thieves? Wouldn't he let you down if he had the Vanderfelt stones in his mitt?" Her fingers ached around the brown leather bag. The gate was only a step now.

Through her swaying consciousness she heard the baying of the dog-Kato. She had grown somewhat accustomed to it. Then suddenly she sat up, sweat cold on her body. The baying was drawing near. Rising in surging crescendo of sound over to her right. A heavy body crashed through the shrubbery. Kato was loose! Had caught her scent! Was on the trail!

She struggled to her feet, senses blurred before the rising tide of terror that engulfed her. Man she could understand. Man she could only fear so much. Hard training had taught her how to deal with man, but a beast! A great slavering-mouthed creature springing out of the dark—

Behind the rush of the dog came the running footsteps of a man.

She cried shrilly, "Dan! Dan!" Wondering why she bothered since it would likely be Kessler or Paget.

SHE heard a startled grunt, a curse. There was the sound of lunging, struggling bodies, a gruff voice saying thickly, "Hold on, you devil," the dreadful hunting whine of a dog, eager for the kill.

Ellen tried to run. If she could reach the gate the dog couldn't get over the wall. Once outside she would be safe. Her feet were leaden. With eyes grown accustomed to the darkness, she made out the form of the great dog rearing over her, front paws in the air. Caught the squeak of a stout leather harness as he was drawn back by the cursing, floundering man who held him.

Ellen acted without conscious volition as she jerked her small flashlight out, shot it full strength into the dog's eyes. For a long, terrible moment he was thrown into relief. A great-bodied, mighty-muscled brute, with wide, slavering jaws and small, reddish eyes.

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His fangs gleamed as he hurled himself forward at whatever new menace confronted him in this glaring light. There was a sharp crack of leather breaking, a dismayed yell, seemingly all at once.

The dog leaped. Ellen thought, "This is the end. He will kill me before I can move."

She saw the beautiful silvery body arcing toward her, felt the hot breath on her face. Heard the report of a shot. Watched unemotionally as the dog halted in mid-stride, twisted horribly, fell with a dull crash, lay there twitching, blood gushing from a jagged tear between his eyes. Then she heard a man say,

"Good work, baby, good work," and looked dazedly down at the gun in her hand. The man was beside her now, a furtive, uncouth figure. She saw his thin, whiskery face. His oddly gleaming eyes. Heard his uneven breathing, as he asked,

"Just who in hell are you, beautiful?"

She answered quietly enough. "I am Ellen Conway, but that doesn't matter. Here—" She pressed the little bronze button into his hand. "Jack sent it," she explained. "They've got him cornered in there. It's an S. O. S." She gasped suddenly. "You're Dan, aren't you?"

He laughed without any mirth. "Yes, lovely. Thanks for the tip. Let's get going."

She drew back. "I'm not going in there—"

His hand, hard as nails, clamped on her shoulder. She felt herself propelled along the ragged path toward the house.

"Oh, yes you are, charming," Dan promised her. "Oh, yes, baby, you're coming right along in."

THE man who had called himself Tavelli said levelly, "That's foolish, of course. I can't get the girl back. I never saw her until I came here tonight."

Paget's smile was a snarl. "No? Well, that's just too bad, guy, 'cause it's your death warrant. Your little playmate won't get any place, you know. Kato's loose. Hear that baying? Kato's a killer. Trained that way. And now he's loose—" He laughed at the whitening of the other's face. "That gets hold, doesn't it, old-timer? You don't like the thought of the pretty lady being mangled by big, bad Kato. You'd like it even less if you could really see Kato at work—"

He stopped as through the drum of the rain came the muffled sound of a shot. His lips whitened. For just an instant his eyes flicked to the window. In that instant Tavelli fired through his pocket. The gun roared in the warm confines of the room. He leaped for the divan, shoved it out, ducked behind, crouched there, gun leveled.

Irene screamed, leaping to her feet, eyes green with hate.

"Vance! Vance, are you hurt?"

Paget's laugh bubbled. He was reeling drunkenly in room's center, blood trickling from the corner of his loose mouth. "Not hurt," he choked. "Not hurt—only dizzy. Can't lift the damned gun. You take it, Irene, you get the dirty, double-crossing—"

"Stay where you are," Tavelli rapped, as the woman surged forward. "I'll plug you, lady, if you move."

She hesitated, whining in helpless fury. Paget stormed weakly. "Get the gun. Burn him down—" He tried desperately to lift his heavy arm. The blue fingers relaxed. The gun thudded to the rug. He staggered, kicked at it. It shot across the polished floor, straight to

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the woman's feet. She ducked for it and Tavelli's shot went over her head.

Laughing crazily, she crouched on the floor, gun pointed. "Get you now," she spat. "Get you now—"

The door behind her opened very softly. A man stood there, white-faced, grim-eyed, soaked with mud and water. He caught details in one comprehending flash, then he leaped, hurling himself full force on the kneeling woman, crashing her to the floor, stifling her startled cry by the impact of his body. His strong, dirty hand twisted the gun free. He gave her a brutal shove, straightened, breathing hard. He looked at the man behind the divan.

"Okay, Chief," he said. "I guess that fixes it. This mug here"—he looked indifferently at the moaning Paget, huddled in a chair, worrying at his chest with thin, bloody fingers—"he's out anyway, ain't he?"

The man who had impersonated Tavelli gave the divan another shove and walked out. "Thanks, Dan," he said, then frowned as he saw Ellen Conway. She stood motionless just inside the door. Her hair clung soddenly to her white, expressionless face. Her hands sagged limply, slim wrists heavy with the weight of metal cuffs.

Dan said, "This little wren brought the office, Chief. I let the damned dog loose, on the hope of running something to earth. He nearly got away from me. This kid shot him and passed me your badge. I'd 'a' been in sooner, but Susan said to wait for her signal. Passed me the office on the back porch."

The other man interrupted shortly. "Bad news, kid, take it on the chin. Kessler killed Susan Dilke. Got wise, I guess. Take it on the chin."

Dan took it. For a moment his face twisted in quick, almost unbearable pain. His grim lips quivered. His eyes held a sudden look of madness. "Kessler!" he choked. "Kessler killed her!"

"Yes."

"Where's Kessler? I'll—"

A STRONG, quiet hand rested a moment on the boy's shaking shoulders. "Take it standing, son. It's the game, you know." He paused, breathing unevenly. "She was a regular guy," he said, in simple obituary, and added, "As for Kessler, well, he's croaked there behind the divan. According to Susan, he was already marked for death by the other two here."

He walked to Paget, unfastened his shirt, examined the wound, grunted. "Not so good. Better put through a call to Conningsby, Dan. We want him alive, if possible." He looked at Irene, crouching sullen and silent in the shadows by the table. Quickly he drew cuffs from his pocket, snapped them securely around her slim, beautiful wrists.

"She'll get a neat stretch," he muttered. "Kessler and these two pulled the Vanderfelt job unaided. I got the story tonight."

He looked last at Ellen Conway, looked long and with his face in shadow, then he walked over and stood before her.

"And now," he asked slowly, "just who are you?"

Her heavy head lifted. She met his sharp, disturbing glance without flinching. "I am Ellen Conway," she said clearly, "employed by the—"

He laughed. "Department of Education," he began, but she stopped him.

"No, the Mid-West Life Insurance Company, of New York. We wrote the policy on the Venderfelt jewels."

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She glanced down at her manacled hands. "And you?"

His lips twitched in that unforgetable smile. "John Hayes Armour," he told her. "Chief of the Homicide Squad of the Chicago Police Department."

They looked at each other for a long time, then he drew a key from his pocket, unlocking the cuffs. "You gave a swell imitation of a tough little moll working a hot lay alone," he confided.

Her white lips smiled. "And you a lone wolf, chiseling in on a closed corporation."

"Lone wolf's right—but I felt coming undercover as Tavelli was my best gamble in getting the goods on the Kessler pair and this man Paget; nosed 'em out here through a tapped wire in Tavelli's office. Smart as they were they should have figured we'd have the bee on the biggest fence in the business."

"—and Susan," spoke Ellen, "working for your department, got the job—"

"As housekeeper here," he finished. "We pulled wires at the employment agency and did she learn plenty?" He glanced at Dan, lowering his voice. "His mother," he said sadly. "Her husband was a copper and her father before her—she worked with us sometimes."

Ellen's eyes misted. "Breaks of the game," she spoke low. "I—I would have liked knowing Susan Dilke."

He nodded wordlessly.

"And the Vanderfelt gems?" she asked.

"Were merely a means to an end with us. We wanted someone to fry for the murder of as grand an old man as ever drew breath."

Ellen nodded understandingly. "Of course. Well, I was after the stones and I got them." From the pocket of the big raincoat she wore she dragged the brown leather bag, held it out to him.

"The Mid-West followed a hunch on shadowing Tavelli too," she smiled. "After our 'Frisco agent wired he was negotiating with an Oriental fence for passing a carload of 'ice'—the Vanderfelt haul was the biggest Chi' take in years, and—well—that's why I was dogging the green sedan along that beastly detour."

"I thought you'd just acted natural in copping them," he said, as he took them. "Just figured you were outsmarting one of your own kind."

"I figured I was outsmarting a pretty smart crook," she said gravely. "I'm too soft for this job, though. When I got to the gate, with the road clear for a get-away, I couldn't leave you all alone without sending Dan in to help you."

Under his grave regard, soft color burned her cheeks. He said slowly, "You know, Ellen Conway, I somehow figured you as that kind of a girl. I said to myself, 'Here's too nice a kid to be in the racket.'"

She laughed suddenly. "And it hurt me somehow to think that you—" Confusion stopped her. They kept on looking at each other.

DAN was talking excitedly over the telephone. Captain Armour held his bemused gaze on the girl's tired face, that was flushing beautifully. He remembered her as he had first seen her, in peach blow taffeta, sprayed over with wild roses. His hand went out.

"Stout fellow, Ellen Conway," he said softly, and she slipped her hand into his, eyes suddenly starry through the gray mists of weariness which clouded them.

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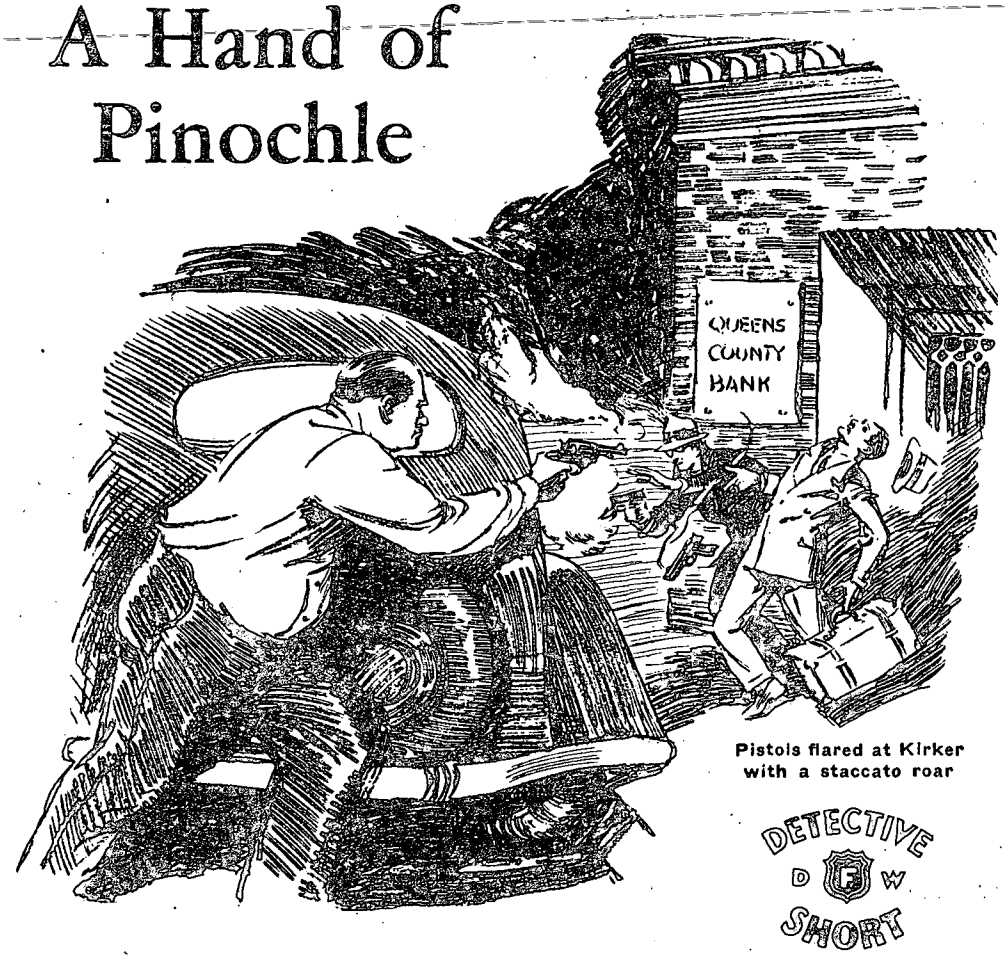
A Hand of Pinochle



Pistols flared at Kirker with a staccato roar

DETECTIVE SHORT

By Theodore Tinsley

"THIS goes for all of you," Captain Daley snapped. "Don't think that because you've been assigned to duty in a rural precinct in Queens that you have nothing to do but chuck old ladies under the chin. The commissioner sent me out here to pep up this precinct, and I intend to get results or there'll be men up on charges."

His eyes focussed meaningly on Patrolman Kirker. Kirker shuffled his big feet nervously and wished old Captain O'Brien were still alive. O'Brien had been easy-going, not like this new skipper with the youthful frown and the crisp snap to his voice. "If only I could get him to play pinochle!" Kirker thought sadly.

Patrolman Kirker Tried to Get "Rod" Cantor, the Sneering Killer—for Reasons That None of the Official Police Records Will Ever Show

Eleven years on the force hadn't made much change

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in Patrolman Adolph Kirker. His feet were a little flatter, his uniform a bit tighter across the stomach, his sun-wrinkled smile deeper. He had served in three boroughs and had made exactly three arrests. The first was an under-sized Sicilian junk peddler whom Adolph had caught viciously larruping a bloated white horse from a rental stable in lower Manhattan. The second was a Bronx janitor who had celebrated an alcoholic birthday by blacking his wife's eye. The third, a taxi driver in Queens, had tinkered unlawfully with his meter and had tried to collect the surcharge with his fists.

Adolph Kirker had drifted to Queens on the border of the city line, because there was no further spot to which a mild and inoffensive cop could be transferred to make room for the stronger-jawed, more ambitious rookies who poured out of the police school every year.

Each time a new commissioner stepped up, Kirker stepped down. He was not at all bitter about it; quite the reverse. In Queens there were shady trees, friendly folk in neat frame houses who called him Mr. Kirker and were like as not to bring out a bottle of cold beer when he passed and asked about the health of his wife. In Manhattan Kirker had lived in a dark, dismal flat. Here he owned his own grassplot and home, or would as soon as he finished making the payments. And every Sunday afternoon, while his wife attended the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Lutheran church, Kirker and his friend Otto Muller played pinochle.

Pinochle! That was the one thing that gave meaning and pleasure to the easy-going existence of Kirker. Even in Queens the virus of bridge had bitten deeply, so that it was hard to find a good steady pinochle player. But Otto Muller, an ex-cop who had taken a lighter job after being wounded and partly crippled, knew the finer points of pinochle and was fond of beer and Liederkranz. Kirker walked his beat, not from block to block but from Sunday to Sunday. In two years he was two dollars ahead of Muller and hopeful of increasing his lead. He smiled dimly at the prospect, the irate face of young Captain Daley a meaningless blur. Daley's curt question cut ruthlessly through his daydream.

"Anything particularly exciting happen on *your* beat?"

"Some kids were playing baseball in a vacant lot on Division Avenue," Kirker mumbled. "One of 'em broke a window, so I—I—"

"Ahh. . . . A broken window. Did you make your annual arrest?"

Kirker's ears were bright red. "I walked the kid a coupla blocks and talked to him like a—a Dutch uncle. He was scared stiff, a big overgrown kid. So I gave him a half dollar and told him to get the window fixed."

"And reconstructed a potential criminal, eh?"

"Yes, sir," Kirker said quietly. "I've watched kids like him before. All they need is a tap on the pants and a bit of help sometimes. Treat 'em rough, sir, and they start robbing tills and buying a cheap gun in Jersey."

"I SEE," Captain Daley murmured. The red in his own face deepened. "A broken window and a bit of welfare work." His voice rose as he struck the typewritten report in his hand a resounding whack with his palm. "Seven Long Island banks knocked over by Rod Cantor

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and his pal—no arrest. Thieves made a haul yesterday not a mile from this squad room—no arrest. From now on that kind of police work is ended. You'll devote your attention to crooks and killers, or I'll have you wishing you had."

There was discreet silence. "That's all," Daley snapped and strode off to his sanctum with a brisk click of his heels.

"Try *that* on your pinochle deck, Adolph," a sardonic voice muttered. Kirker grinned feebly. He was used to being kidded about his Sunday game with Muller.

Mrs. Kirker clucked indignantly when he told her about the new captain's ultimatum. "Why didn't you talk up to him, Adolph? Did you tell him what you did for young Charlie Franklin? Or now you put the fear of the Lord into Dave Martin and made him get busy and support that sweet little family of his?"

Kirker shrugged and didn't answer. What was the use? Those were things the skipper wouldn't understand.

"Anyone would think," his wife sniffed, "that cops were a lot of quarrelsome thugs, running around day and night to shove people into cells. I've a good mind to go around to the station house tomorrow and give that whippersnapper a talking to."

Kirker said mildly, "Now, Hattie!" He was sitting comfortably in a kitchen chair, his uniform coat off, the weight of his gun sagging his hip pocket. His wife bustled between cupboard and stove, preparing the coffee they always drank before they went to bed. She lifted the lid of the bread box and the irritation she felt toward Captain Daley transferred itself suddenly to household affairs.

"Oh, dear. I forgot the crumb cake. Tomorrow's Sunday and the bakery will be closed all morning. Here, take a quarter and get some. The coffee'll be ready by the time you get back."

Kirker sighed. Without crumb cake, dipped in soggy chunks, coffee lacked savor. He padded heavily across the front porch and walked bareheaded up the dark street to the corner. He grunted with disgust as he saw that the bakery was already closed. His tired glance wavered hopefully toward the adjoining bank. He'd stop awhile and say hello to the watchman. Suddenly his blurred smile faded. There was a sedan parked at the curb, its motor quietly purring; and the locked door of the bank wasn't locked—it was slowly opening.

As the door widened Kirker saw two strangers sneak cautiously out, carrying heavy suitcases. In a flash he darted toward the parked automobile to head off the thieves, his hand tugging at his gun. Pistols flared at him with a staccato roar, but the sedan shielded him. He fired and saw one of the crooks drop his suitcase and fall to the sidewalk. The other kept on and reached the car, and Kirker, puffing, sprang to the running-board as the sedan got under way.

A hot streak flicked across the flesh of his neck as he ducked. A quick clutch inward and his fingers jerked at the steering wheel. The sedan curved across the street and rammed head-on into a wooden telephone pole. The impact threw Kirker into the street on his face. A man who had peered out of a window down near the corner, began to blow shrilly on a police whistle and through the darkness came the *thud-thud* of running feet.

The crook, his escape cut off by a

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dead-end street, hesitated and then dashed straight for the open door of the bank. As the dazed Kirker staggered to his feet and clutched for his dropped gun, the bank door slammed and locked.

KIRKER hesitated. He knew the inside of that bank better than the crook did! If he waited out front he could keep the killer bottled up until the precinct reserves arrived. He remembered the thin, taut-lipped sneer he had seen on a placard posted in the station house. He was facing Rod Cantor, the killer who had knocked over seven banks on Long Island. Cantor would fight a frontal attack to a finish, shielding himself behind the helpless body of the watchman.

Whitefaced, Kirker sprang to the tall telephone pole and climbed swiftly up the spiked footholds. It was a dangerous leap across to the roof of the bakery, but he made it. The bank roof was six feet higher. Kirker's bleeding hands hauled him up a rusted vent pipe; a bat of his gun smashed the pane out of the bank's skylight.

Down below Kirker could see Cantor's gun jerk upward, and the sight sent a wave of grim rage through Kirker's aching body. He dropped recklessly, feet first, through a crash of pistol fire. His body struck the crouched gunman and rebounded to the paved floor. Pinwheels of fire whirled through his brain. He lay for a moment, breathless and paralyzed; then, as he swayed to his knees, the glass of the front door crashed and policemen spilled into the bank. A hand clutched at Kirker and helped him to his feet. It was Captain Daley, wildly excited, shouting like a young fool. Kirker stared past him at Cantor and saw steel cuffs on the sprawled crook's wrists. He lay motionless on the tiled floor, his head twisted at a queer angle. The slugged watchman was stirring, groaning feebly.

In a daze Adolph Kirker found himself back in a crowded precinct house where every light was ablaze. The commissioner himself was there after a swift twenty minutes run from Manhattan. Flashlights popped, reporters jammed the tiny squad room. Kirker felt very tired.

"Why did you climb to the roof and pull that wild Tarzan jump?" a reporter asked. "Why didn't you plug Cantor from the back door?"

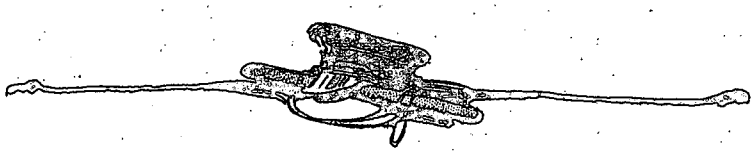
"When you have over four hundred dollars in a bank, you get to know it," Kirker said quietly. "There isn't any back door."

"Ummm. . . . You got fighting mad when you realized you'd trapped Cantor, huh?"

Another camera popped and Captain Daley beamed. "Kirker was on his toes, that's all. There's been a shake-up in this precinct. You see, boys, the commissioner sent me here to—"

Kirker's weary eyes were staring at the bandaged head of his friend, the watchman.

"I guess I did get a little mad," he admitted. "The gall of that rat, Cantor! Damn him, he tried to kill Otto Muller—the only pinochle player in town."



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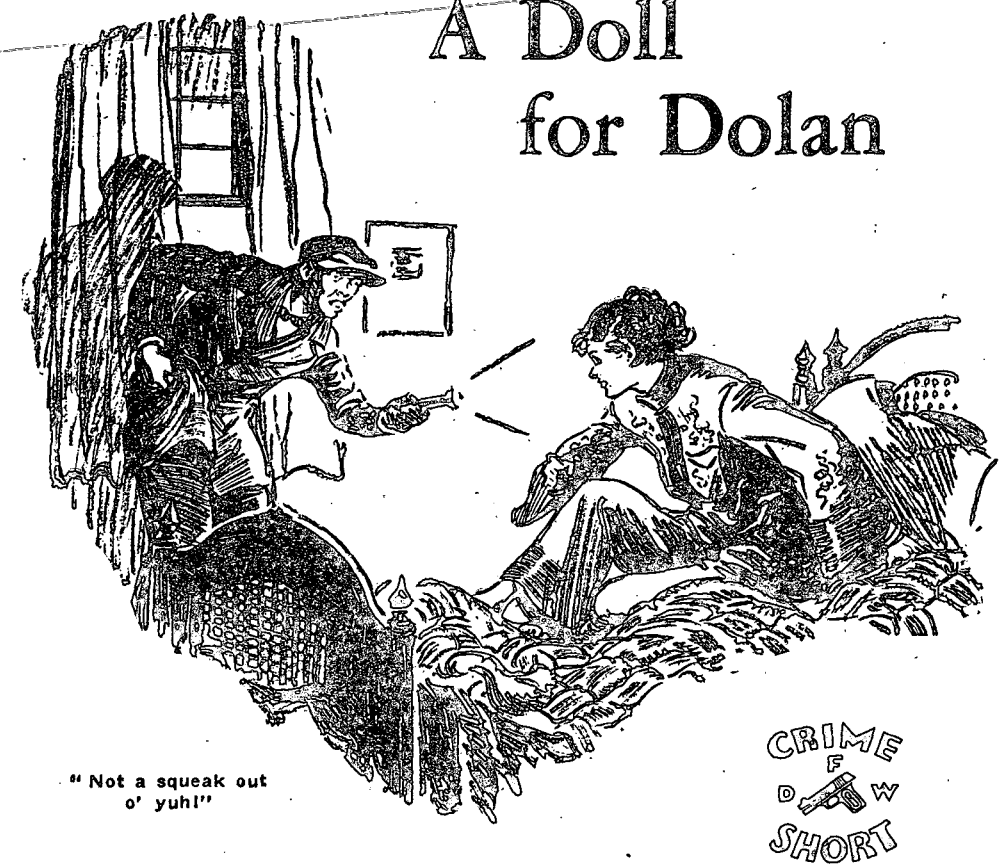
A Doll for Dolan



"Not a squeak out o' yuh!"

By Edgar Franklin

Felicia Rudwell, Blueblood, Knew How to Handle a Rod —but Could She Handle the Cunning "Rat" McGee

LATE spring drenched the midnight air. Through the narrow little rear window of Mr. James (Red) Binney's modest cellar saloon drifted honeysuckle from some surviving backyard bush, to mingle with the sterner smells of stale beer and of alcohol denatured in fearsome ways; but it was the honeysuckle alone which penetrated to the unlovely pug nose of that young and unpromising criminal, Johnny Dolan.

His pale eyes grew dreamy as he sniffed the perfume; he scratched his fuzzy chin and sighed vastly. From his fingers he dusted the crumbs of his hamburger sandwich and, with utmost nonchalance, tossed to the bar his very last quarter—for within hours now there would be quarters by the bushel, not to mention fins and sawbucks and even centuries, in such quantity that a person would have to tie a string around the the roll.

"Red," said Johnny Dolan, with utter irrelevance, "I gotta get me a moll."

Mr. Binney abruptly ceased swab-

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bing his bar and stared at his customer and friend.

"What was you an' the Rat drinkin' before you come in here?" he demanded curiously.

"It's been done before," Johnny Dolan said easily. "A moll with nice, shiny black hair an' one o' them greeny-brown skins t' match an' otherwise—why, Mae West. It's been done before."

"Positively, sucker, by guys that has what it takes an' knows a few o' the answers in the back o' the book," Mr. Binney agreed, "only not by no fish-faced dimwit like you, Johnny, with a pan which makes a person think the house is haunted every time he looks at it. Not by no imitation yegg like you, that couldn't get the pennies offen a dead man's eyes without knockin' over the radio two flights up. Scratch it, kid; y'ain't the type."

"Hey, lissen!" Johnny Dolan protested, for he was a little hurt.

"An' this also you gotta remember about molls," Mr. Binney pursued, his eye kindling. "Big or little, fat or skinny, black, white or yeller, t' the last frill, *they'll cross you!*"

"Not the kind o' moll I got in mind," Johnny smiled serenely.

"Any moll that ever had a run in a stockin'!" Mr. Binney bawled, with swiftly rising heat, from the corner of his mouth. "Looka Flo, the time I had the place in Tenth Avenyer. The once in my life there was five yards in the register, she dumps it in a paper bag an' scrams with a taxi-driver! Looka Jennie Lynch, that I was gonna marry. She rolls me for a four-carat rock an' the price o' furniture for the flat and *then*—yeah, Rat?" he said, suddenly gentle, for he was always attentive to cash customers. "What is it you want?"

"A little less o' yer private life, till I finish this steak in peace!" Mr. Rat McGee snarled, from the corner of his mouth, and went on eating at his table across the room.

He looked exactly the sort of person who would get less of a private life when he so requested.

He was smallish and stooped, but from the last scraggly hair to the tips of his toenails, he was mean. He had a long, sharp nose and a pair of steely gimlet eyes. When he rose, as he did now after tidying his mouth with the back of a hairy paw, one saw that he walked with a pronounced limp. This was the fault of a certain small-arms manufacturer who runs to heavy triggers. The householder who had meant to perforate Rat McGee's heart, just after three that long-gone winter morning, had pulled down until he merely shattered an ankle.

"Hi, punk!" Mr. McGee said sharply to Johnny Dolan. "On our way!"

"Youse boys off for a little outin', huh?" Mr. Binney inquired slyly.

"Well, y'see, Red, it's like this," Johnny Dolan beamed expansively. "Up in Westchester—"

"Why doncher give him the address an' a road map?" the Rat rasped viciously.

"Er—sure! I gotcher, pal!" Johnny Dolan said hastily; and without so much as a formal good-by to Mr. Binney, he walked straight through the door, with the Rat clumping laboriously after.

MR. McGEE'S car was just around the corner, a nice enough little two-door affair, but cheap. That is the great disadvantage of using stolen cars exclusively: one must stick to the plentiful, low-priced models or risk trouble through the whole week before one wrecks the

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vehicle or it grows too hot for comfort. Still, this job was serviceable enough to get them to that very high-hat suburb, Falmont, by two o'clock.

"Run through it again!" the Rat snapped, as he drove up Fifth Avenue.

Johnny Dolan heaved a resigned sigh.

"I a'ready run through it ten thousand times. However, puttin' on the record again: this doll is pretty near the richest girl in America. She's one o' these health cranks which for some reason wants to live a long time and consequently is always asleep before midnight. Accordin' t' what your girl-friend, the chambermaid, told you, she sleeps like she was full o' hop.

"Her room is the last one on the east on the second floor an' the screens ain't been put up yet for the summer. The stuff is always kept in a green velvet box in a small, black, sorter Chinese cabinet which stands on the left side o' the room, goin' in by the window, an' beyond the bed, which is t' the right. The trick Chinese key is kept in the right-hand drawer of the doll's vanity table, in a small purse. Okey dokey?"

"It is, if you really got it through that ivory dome an' ain't just reelin' it off like a poll-parrot," the Rat conceded grudgingly. "Got yer rod?"

"Don't I wear it, day an' night?"

"Loaded?"

"Did I bring it t' eat soup with?" Johnny Dolan asked mildly.

"Naw, you brought it t' cool the moll, in case you fall over yer own feet an' wake her up!" Mr. McGee snarled forcefully. "An' make no mistake about that angle, punk! The *foist* peep out o' her, if she wakes up for any reason whatsoever, stick the rod between her eyes an' give her the business!"

"Rat," Johnny Dolan also snarled, and as ominously, for he knew about how Mr. McGee liked his conversation served, "the doll is the same as dead now!"

"If you gotta drill her, drill her quick an' then chuck me this whole Chinese thing outa the window—*an' no slips!*" Rat McGee rumbled on. "An' remember, I'm only takin' you in on this on account my bum leg won't let me climb no ladders, an' I'm handin' you plenty when I cut it three ways an' give you one."

With a mighty effort, Johnny Dolan made his nod indifferent.

But, inside, was he indifferent? Yeah, he was indifferent just like the guy that sees the rope getting thrown when he's going down for the third time, just like the guy that's getting strapped in the hot seat and sees the keeper hurry in with word that the Governor is finally over his indigestion and has changed his mind.

Why? Well, for one reason, because him and the Rat was about to pull one of the ace jobs of the year and, only it don't never do no good to show a party how grateful you are. Johnny Dolan could have thrown his arms around Rat McGee and kissed him, for letting him on this at all!

Different times, probably, you read in the papers about the jewels this Felicia Rudwell doll keeps around the house? The four emerald bracelets supposed to be worth twenty thousand fish apiece and this here famous Marama pearl necklace they tell you set old man Rudwell back half a million? Them figures, naturally, are a lot of baloney; but at that, the way they'd added it up with Solly Levine, who would be moving the stuff, when this tin Lizzie rolled back to Broadway she'd be carrying better than two hun-

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dred grand, net! Yeah, and *that* meant better than sixty grand for Johnny Dolan alone!

It hit him again, just as it had been hitting him at intervals for three days now, the sheer, incredible tremendousness of the whole enterprise. Once more, Johnny Dolan began to tremble. Why, take for instance, not counting nothing else, the kind of moll a person with sixty grand can drag around and—

"If that slug ain't left the ladder exactly where I showed him," Mr. McGee reflected pleasantly, aloud, "we'll cut the soles offen his feet an' rip his tongue out by the roots!"

THE soles and tongue of the unnamed slug, however, were safe. Nicely hidden, the ladder reposed beneath the hedge. Beyond the hedge were smooth acres of velvet lawn and beyond the lawn, in utter darkness, loomed a great country house. The season's first few débutante insects chirped drowsy encouragement as Johnny Dolan stole over the lawn at one end of the ladder and Mr. McGee at the other.

And here was the absolutely dippy thing: it seemed that in this big moment Johnny Dolan had sorter changed somehow; he could feel it inside him, like he'd quit being dumb and clumsy and sorter swelled up to the size of the job. What he meant, here they'd already covered about fifty miles of this grass and still he hadn't tripped and gone down on his nose or been took with a noisy attack of sneezing or anything!

More! With never a sound and never a scrape, the tall ladder had been propped against the wall, comfortably topping the sill of the last east window on the second floor. Even the emotional Mr. McGee's voice was a bit unsteady as he whispered: "Well, hop to it, punk! Watcher step the next five minutes an' you'll be eatin' cakes with gold syrup on 'em!"

And then Johnny was climbing, up, up, up, and it seemed the funny change in him was holding something elegant: he had reached the very top of the ladder without breaking his neck and he was staring into the gloom beyond the open window.

And also, as he suddenly sensed, it seemed he was going nuts!

He was hearing things. He was hearing a dog whine in the distance, only it wasn't a dog and it wasn't in the distance. It didn't seem to be anywhere at all that you could place, and still it was there. Johnny Dolan scowled perplexedly and listened again. A very soft, strangling "yurrrrrp!" strayed vaguely through the whining sound.

"What's got you now? A stroke?" hissed wickedly up from the ground.

With a start, Johnny Dolan gripped himself. If he desired, as indeed he did, to lead the life of Riley for the rest of his days, this was no time to be going nuts. He threw a leg over the sill and, having stepped inside, he wrestled the flashlight from his rear trousers pocket.

It was *still* going on! "Umph—umpha—umph!" and then finished off with a stifled, sizzling sound like steam escaping from a leaky valve. Briefly, Johnny Dolan's hair stood on end. It could easy be that there were ghosts in this drum; they'd naturally keep a thing like that out of the papers. Perspiring freely, he fingered at the button of his flashlight and finally jabbed it forward.

He stood gaping, petrified. According to the dope, the Rudwell frill

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hit the hay by eleven-thirty and thereafter pounded her ear like there was a chloroform sponge tied over her nose. Well, then, either this was the wrong room or the dope was very, very sour; because on the outside of the great bed some black-haired doll in fancy silk pajamas huddled down, her face buried in the pillow, crying as if her heart would bust!

Next, the moment's really terrific phase crashed down on him.

When you worked under the Rat's capable direction, you followed orders to the letter—or else. The Rat had ordered that Johnny Dolan immediately cool the doll if she waked up, and here she was already awake. Bright drops on Mr. Dolan's forehead turned to streams, which ran down his nose and into his eyes, and his teeth chattered audibly; for in simple truth, despite much hair-raising discussion of homicide, it happened that never yet had Johnny Dolan taken a shot at a human being.

Still, there has to be a first time for everything.

Gasping, swallowing repeatedly, he fumbled with icy fingers in the side pocket of his coat.

"What—what the devil—" the girl cried amazedly, suddenly sitting up in the circle of light.

"H-h-hold it, kid! Not a s-squeak out o' yuh!" Johnny Dolan panted, and tugged even again.

But she wasn't acting the way she should. She was mad, not scared. Her reddened eyes snapping, she bounded from the bed and came straight at him—and just there, as it seemed, the great Rudwell house collapsed! The floor, that is to say, apparently flew up and smacked Johnny Dolan and the ceiling also came down and hit him. Ten billion blazing stars flamed briefly before his uncomprehending eyes. Then there was only blackness.

II

HE was sprawled on a very soft bed, in some place where there were shaded lights. He moaned weary resignation. So he'd stumbled in front of still another truck, huh, and here he was back in the accident ward? Probably the usual dozen bones were broken, but mostly this truck appeared to have socked him on the right jaw, which was swollen and very toothachy. Without moving, Johnny Dolan let his eyes rove foggily about and—hey! this wasn't no accident ward! This room was blue, not white, and there was a shelf on the wall full of big silver cups.

"What's all—the tinware?" he murmured, most remotely.

"Tennis cups. I won 'em. That's where the muscle came from," an exquisite contralto voice answered. "I didn't mean to knock you quite as cold as that, but you asked for it. You were trying to shoot me, weren't you? Or were you?"

Johnny Dolan's head rolled over slowly and his heart skipped a beat. The moll in the trick pajamas was sitting, quite clubbily, on the bed beside him—*and what a moll!* Shiny black hair and beautiful big black eyes and that greeny-brown skin which goes with them; but the outstanding feature of her seemed to be her total lack of fear. Johnny Dolan, it may be said, considered himself an extremely tough egg; yet this dame, who had put him down for the count, was smiling.

"Nice to run across you like this, anyhow, burglar," she said. "What were you meaning to burgle? My jewelry?"

"Yes, lady," Johnny Dolan said thinly, and stared on.

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"And I spoiled it with a straight left to the jaw! Do stop fumbling in that pocket. I have your gun. Feel it?" She jabbed it into his ribs.

"Yes, lady," Johnny Dolan said. "Would it be okey dokey if I was to sit up now? I wouldn't try to make no getaway."

"You wouldn't go far if you did," the girl assured him cheerily. "I usually beat ninety on the twenty-five yard target with a four-inch barrel and this piece of junk has a four-inch barrel if it hasn't much of anything else. Sit up, by all means."

Johnny Dolan wobbled to an upright position, found himself distinctly giddy and for a little held his aching head in his hands. Things in general, however, were clearing with perfectly ghastly speed: even now he had the whole picture.

"Hey, lady!" he said suddenly. "Would it also be okey dokey if I was t' take it on the lam for that window, an' then you lemme have it, all five shots? On account of, if I go down that ladder without them bracelets and that, now, necklace, the Rat is gonna gimme the same—an' I'd rather it come from you!"

The decorative young person opened her eyes.

"Burglar, you're not going sentimental on me? Who's the Rat? Your partner?"

"An' a quite bad actor," Johnny Dolan explained sadly, "which has cut the heart out of at least one party I positively know about."

The girl stared on, bosom heaving a little, lips tightening.

"Score one more jackass point for 'em!" she said quite oddly. "They've locked me in here like a wild animal and they've unplugged my telephone line downstairs; so now, if I want to rouse the blasted family, I'll have to screech my head off and that'll scare away your Rat and—" She stopped short; her black eyes flashed at Johnny Dolan. "*Ladder*, you said?"

"Sure I said ladder. Some slug—"

"Don't speak for at least a minute!" the peculiar girl commanded. "Don't even breathe!"

Johnny Dolan gaped at her, sitting there with her hands pressed to her temples and the muzzle of his basement-bargain revolver pointing at the high ceiling. To tell the truth, it seemed that she also was going slightly nuts, the funny, jerky way she was breathing and the way her eyes kept snapping, like she had all her jack on a fifty-to-one shot and he was leading down the stretch by nine lengths.

THEN dimples appeared. She smiled, widely and more widely, and Johnny Dolan felt as if he were melting or coming all to pieces. What he meant, he got weak in the joints and the same as hypnotized; for now the doll had hitched much nearer and, believe it or not, it seemed that they were friends!

"What's your name, burglar?" she asked softly.

"Johnny—well—Dolan."

"Mine's Felicia Rudwell. You knew that, naturally. Johnny, were you ever very, very much in love, so much in love that nothing else in the world mattered? Well, you have been, of course. You've got a cute little she-burglar in a flat somewhere and the other people in the house think you're an insurance salesman and married, and all," the girl hurried on.

"Johnny, I'm in love like that. I'm in love with the most wonderful man that ever lived." She paused, allowing Johnny Dolan practically to drown in

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her eyes. "He's poor as a church-mouse and so of course my family—but I don't have to tell you that part. We were going to elope tonight; he's waiting for word from me, over in the Pelway Inn; and somebody tipped off my father and so I'm locked in the solitary. You came in a car, didn't you? Well, Johnny, would you like to do something that will make me very, very happy, if you were well paid for it?"

"Lady," Johnny Dolan stuttered gallantly, "you can tie a can to that gettin' paid stuff, on account of for *you* any guy would—"

"Piffle!" said the intelligent girl, noting with satisfaction that her work was all and neatly done. "This is business. We'll make a bargain."

She whisked off the bed. She whisked to her vanity table and from a purse there she brought a large, quaint old key. She flitted across the room to the black Chinese cabinet and unlocked its heavy door with the key. And lastly, having taken from its depths a green velvet jewel-case, she flitted back to Johnny Dolan.

"Look!" she said and opened the case. "I just want you to know that everything's—er—quite as you expected it to be, I suppose."

Well—you hadda say the moll certainly wasn't stringing him. Johnny Dolan scowled incredulously, but it certainly was all there, just the way they had the dope. In one compartment four bracelets that looked like green fire; in the next the necklace of matched pearls, which were probably elegant, but for which Johnny Dolan, personally, wouldn't have given a plugged nickel, on account he never did like beads. In the third compartment there were a dozen pretty swell rings.

"Thanks very much, lady," Johnny Dolan said hoarsely, numbed and bewildered because in all his days he had never dreamed of a burglary like this, and reached for the case.

"Darling, this will have to be a C. O. D. transaction," Miss Rudwell dimpled, stepping away and closing the case. "You see, I want you and your Rat to deliver me and my grip to the Pelway Inn as soon as possible; and then you may come back for these—and loot the whole darned ranch, too, if you feel like taking a chance! But if we took along the—swag, do you call it in the trade? Mr. Rat may not care to bother with the extra trip. He might want to cut my heart out and just hurry along to the next job. Well? It's a bargain that way?"

"Any way you say, lady," Johnny Dolan mumbled.

As he watched her, Miss Rudwell flitted again to the cabinet and replaced the jewel-case. She locked the cabinet carefully, tried the door and withdrew the key.

"Catch!" she said, and tossed it to Johnny Dolan. "And now sit right where you are, please, with your back to me. I'll have to pack and then—of course, it's horribly embarrassing!—I'll do my dressing behind the screen."

Johnny Dolan hunched there, staring at the key, trying to figure out how a thing like this could happen to a guy.

Chink stuff, this key—all curly-cues and twists; you never see no keys like that here in America. It would probably take a guy, even an extra good guy, a week to make a key like that and get it right.

Behind Johnny, matters were going forward with swishing speed. He heard a screen scrape lightly on the floor, he heard a grip dragged out and opened, he heard drawers open and closets open, he heard the hasty rustle

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of soft garments. Then drawers and closets began to close again.

"Hold it, just another minute or two, palsy-walsy," Miss Rudwell whispered jubilantly. "I'll have to dash off a note to my dad."

JOHNNY DOLAN held it, not knowing, understand, whether she had her clothes on yet or not. He heard her pen scratch swiftly for a little. Then he heard Miss Rudwell cough—a little tickling sort of cough at first and then it turned into a bark loud enough to wake the dead! She coughed and coughed; he was just getting uneasy about the disturbance when the fit passed and she laughed gently:

"Phew! They can't have dusted that closet in a month. Well—all set, Johnny. You go down first and catch my bag."

When Johnny Dolan reached the bottom of the ladder Rat McGee spoke in an incisive undertone, with tremendous feeling: "Who told yuh t' turn on the lights up there, an' am I bughouse or was you talkin' to yourself, an' where is the stuff?"

"One side, lug!" Johnny Dolan ordered, with strange authority, "I gotta catch her bag . . . I got it!"

Disregarding the several apoplectic wheezes from Mr. McGee, he watched Miss Rudwell come down the ladder like a fireman in a rush. Then, ordinarily stolid malefactor though he was, Mr. McGee gasped out:

"Yuh—yuh dumb cluck! *Who t'hell told yuh t' steal the moll?*"

"Mr. Rat, *please!* We're trying to make a quiet getaway, you know," Miss Rudwell breathed. "Oh, yes, your gun, if you don't mind, Mr. Rat? Yes, this is Johnny's pistol in your stomach, held by a woman who's going places or bust, so if you don't want to be smeared all over our lawn—oh, thank you! Let's go!"

III

FIVE miles over to Pelway and five miles back. Another six or eight minutes, and they'd be beside the Rudwell hedge again.

"Well, we certain'y done that little hunk o' sugar candy a swell turn," Johnny Dolan sighed. "Was she wild with joy when the big lob come downstairs 'n' took her in the clinch, or was she wild with joy!"

Mr. McGee, driving, mouth set hard, said nothing.

Indeed, this past half hour, words had altogether failed the Rat. He had heard it all, of course, and being an astute person he had understood it all; but in spite of that he couldn't quite believe that any of it had actually happened. Molls of many kinds had figured in the lurid McGee past, but never before a one-punch moll and never before any kind of moll who could take away his rod and hold it between his shoulder-blades while he drove five miles.

"She really had a right t' return them rods," Johnny Dolan reflected. "At that, I suppose she figured we'd be dirty with jack before mornin' an' could buy better."

Still Rat McGee said nothing.

"Quite some looker, huh?" Johnny rambled on. "An' also very much on the up an' up, as you noticed. It ain't every moll would 'a' took it like that, Rat, not scared nor nothin', an' cuttin' her own percentage out o' the deal that way. It ain't every moll would 'a' slipped us her pretties, just for a taxi ride t' the guy she's that way about. It ain't every moll would 'a'—"

"For the luvva tripe, *shut up!*" Mr. McGee screamed, suddenly explod-

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ing. "You're gettin' me down! Dolan, I had it told me by several parties, when I first mentioned takin' you in on this, that everything you touch goes absolutely screwy. I heard about how you spent nine nights cuttin' a hole up through the floor, an' then found you was in the delicatessen instead o' the jeweler's next door.

"I heard how all one night you followed the bank president with the long tan overcoat, that was supposed to have fifty grand in his inside pocket, an' finally stuck him up in an alley an' seen it was the porter he'd given the overcoat to. I heard how—"

"Accidents can happen to anybody," Johnny Dolan reminded him, indulgently. "You'll talk different when I hand you that jewel-case."

Mr. McGee slowed, almost to a stop.

"You poor dumb sap!" he muttered wonderingly. "Ain't there *nothin' at all* inside that dome t' tell yuh she's a'ready phoned over an' there's fifteen troopers waitin' in them bushes?"

"Lissen, Rat!" Johnny Dolan responded sharply. "You got the moll very wrong. She ain't one t' pull that stuff. T' prove it, I'll go across them lawns alone!"

"*You're* tellin' *me* you'll go alone!" the Rat hooted derisively. "Punk, get this an' figure out yer own answers. You've put the finger on the grandest little set-up I ever made, an' for a payoff I probably gotta take the laugh I get when them bulls put the collar on you. Believe you me, sucker, you'll go alone all right; an' whatever stretch they give you, remember when you get out, *this* is waitin' for you!"

Melodramatically, Mr. McGee reached deftly to the back of his neck and slipped out the thin, shiny knife which lived along the upper part of his spine and which he had not felt warranted in trying on a determined young woman with two pistols. "An' supposin' there's one chance in a million you might get inside the drum again without a skinful o' lead, pull any more funny tricks an' come out without the stuff, and it's *still* waiting for you!"

He had covered the subject in characteristic fashion, of course—and yet Johnny Dolan remained amazingly unperturbed. His lip curled pityingly as he smiled at the Rat.

"You're batty," he said. "There won't be no fifteen troopers, not with a square moll like her. Look, Rat. If there's one moll like that in the world, there's two. No sooner we cash in, I'm gonna find the other an'—oh, are we here a'ready?"

THERE were no fifteen troopers. There was not even one trooper. Johnny Dolan walked quite fearlessly across the lawn and straight to the ladder, and never a single soul filed one objection. He stopped and listened. He laughed softly and with great satisfaction. He'd had the moll absolutely right and he was as safe here as home in his own bed.

He felt in his pocket for the big, queer key. Curiously enough, it was still there. He climbed the ladder quite gracefully, and even paused and yawned when he came to the top. Then, all unafraid, happily conscious that he was working under conditions which rarely come once in a burglar's lifetime, he swung into Miss Rudwell's bed-chamber and flashed his light about.

Still and empty, to the last detail it was exactly as he had left it. He chuckled even more contentedly and moved across to the Chinese cabinet. Humming softly to himself, he fitted the key and opened the door.

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"And nuts to you, Rat!" Johnny Dolan snickered, as he drew out the velvet jewel-case.

Lissen! would he give one loud, hoarse laugh, right in the Rat's face, when he handed him this case! And would he jab his thumb into the poor pill's skinny ribs and ask him *now* about up and up molls! Indeed and indeed he would, Johnny Dolan decided and, all aquiver with pleasant mirth, he tucked the case under his arm and—*huh?*

Didn't it seem like something ought to have rattled in there when he did that? What he meant, this jewelry was all loose. Already at the window, Johnny Dolan paused and scowled heavily. Positively, the jewels were inside this little box, on account of he had seen them put there and then get locked up in the cabinet.

And the moll had tossed him the key, with him watching all the while. But—well, with a bad actor like the Rat you took no chances. Suddenly cold and uncomfortable, Johnny Dolan perched on the edge of the bed and picked at the cover of the jewel-case. It rose almost too readily.

And, save for one folded scrap of paper, *the case was empty!*

His mouth sagged open. Little beads came again to his forehead. He twitched bewilderedly at the paper and a ten-dollar bill, folded into it, dropped to his palm. And now he had the thing flattened out, now with the flashlight tucked under his arm and illuminating the half-sheet of note paper, he was reading it:

Johnny my lad:

I've heard that there is honor among thieves, but I'm not a thief; and, anyhow, we're likely to be living for quite a while on what these will bring. But here's something to pay for the gas and—thanks a lot! *F. R.*

P. S. The dear old soul in Shanghai—whoever he was—made two of those keys and I always carry one on me. Wasn't that cute of him?

Well—he had been stunned when he saw the doll crying on this bed. Now, for the second time in the same night in the same room, Johnny Dolan sat there, stunned all over again.

He was getting it slowly, but he was getting it. While she was coughing, understand? The way she'd barked and gargled that time, she could have opened ten cabinets and dumped ten jewel-cases, and still he'd never have heard it. Only . . . to get crossed by *that* moll!

He stared for a time at the ten-dollar bill and at last mechanically stuffed it in his pocket. So now what? Johnny Dolan scratched his unornamental cranium.

Well, it seemed he had a problem on his hands, huh? One of them problems you guess right the first time or win a pair of white wings for a consolation prize. He could go down and come clean with the Rat and take what the Rat had waiting for him; and maybe some day, if she had that much hard luck, an elderly mother in Rhode Island would hear that her son had been vivisected on some bent-grass in Westchester. Or he would glide down the ladder and, since the Rat was waiting due east of this point, he could strike off in a westerly direction and keep right on going until he could thumb a car headed for Seattle.

The latter course had much the greater appeal. Johnny Dolan tossed aside the case and, hurrying to the window, was about to throw a leg over the sill when he descried the murky,

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whitish spot moving below. He leaned out and stared. He froze! It was indeed the cap of Rat McGee, who must have taken courage at the complete lack of excitement here!

JOHNNY DOLAN drew back hurriedly. His knees began to shake, gently and decently at first and then more and more energetically, until they were fairly whizzing around in their sockets and banging against one another. He—he—he had to sit down a minute!

There was a little chair beside him. Johnny Dolan sat on that, swallowing, chattering soundlessly to himself, as monkeys will, shaking his head, trying to make it work fast enough to save the rest of his anatomy . . . Well, lissen now! He couldn't sit here like this forever, on account of somebody'd come in the morning to make the bed, or something. So—so when he could stand on these knees, it seemed he'd have to be ready with an alibi that would stick even with the Rat and—what was *that?*

Near at hand, a door had closed. Near at hand, steps were approaching. Somewhere on this floor, somebody was wide awake and walking around! With one loud gasp, with no second thought at all, Johnny Dolan started over the sill and downward, to take his chances with the Rat.

And then. . . .

The knees did it. Just as he hit the third rung, they seemed to fold like so much wet blotting paper, and it was only by the thickness of a hair that Johnny Dolan succeeded in clutching the ladder. He clutched it far too well. It swung out from the house—and out and still out!—and with another wild gasp he hurled himself against it.

And now he'd dislodged it somehow at the bottom. Yes, now it was sliding under him, out and down, down, down, and—glass crashed with a din that could have been heard in the next county. Splinters flew all around Johnny Dolan.

The ladder itself seemed just to dematerialize. Johnny Dolan, with a mighty thud, struck the ground squarely on his back.

His head bounced once or twice. Then he lay still, blinking. It looked like the damn' thing must 'a' slid right out under him, huh, so the top end of it went through the first-floor window. It looked like—Johnny Dolan staggered hurriedly to his feet. Rat McGee, great fists clenched, was wheezing with pure maniacal effect: "You—dumb—*aaah!*"

His temper gone, his knife quite forgotten, he swung at Johnny Dolan's jaw with his powerful left. He connected, too, and Johnny Dolan spun away crazily, stumbling, gasping and, now, running. Aye, running as he had never run before in all his days; running so swiftly that, had any fleet gazelle been there to race him, the fleet gazelle must have quit in tears; leaping, too, as leaps the frightened stag before the hounds.

Once, just for a second, he looked back. Hell sure had busted loose! Mr. McGee, clumping slowly after him, had been overtaken by a great white nightgown and a huge pair of light pajamas. There was shouting and scrambling and the distinct sound of a whack. Very faintly, Johnny Dolan caught: "Bashed him with the blighted rolling-pin, Curtis! Fetch a rope before he comes 'round!"

Johnny Dolan kept on running. Not so bright perhaps as a rule, his sense of location now seemed no less than marvelous. He shot into Mr. McGee's

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car as if a mighty magnet had dragged him through the door.

Mr. James (Red) Binney paused in the swabbing of his car and studied the approaching Johnny Dolan.

"Stick your head in a beehive, pal?" he queried. "Your pan's quite swole on both sides. More on the right than on the left, I'd say."

"It's my pan," Johnny Dolan answered morosely.

"An' who else'd want it?" Mr. Binney merrily laughed and changed the subject. "Well, things didn't break so good last night, accordin' to what I read in the early evening editions, huh? The butler an' the chauffeur put the collar on the Rat, outside that Rudwell house, up above, an' what with the stretches he's done a'ready it looks like this time he gets life!"

"That's his headache," Johnny Dolan said, more morosely.

He was trying to think. He was trying to get it, and he couldn't get it. Molls, what he meant. Not any moll—maybe nine molls out of ten would cross you, the way Red said. But *that* moll! An' him, the poor sap, kidding himself last night he'd have sixty grand this morning!

Mr. Binney, always anxious to please a customer, changed the subject even again.

"Well, how's it comin' about this knockout you was speakin' o' gettin', Johnny?" he asked jovially.

"What?" Johnny Dolan rasped, coming out of the trance.

Mr. Binney started and stared at him. Johnny Dolan, breathing noisily, stared right back at Mr. Binney. On account of, it this guy had heard something and was trying to make a crack. He relaxed a little. Red hadn't heard nothing; a moll like her wouldn't be trading here.

"Gimme beer!" he snapped. "No—hold it! Gimme that beer glass, empty. Now gimme rye!" He dropped a ten dollar bill to the bar. *"Take out for the bottle!"* Johnny Dolan said savagely.

The Wall's Ears

AMONG the contributions made by inventors to detective work are two devices which enable the investigator to listen in on conversations over the telephone, and otherwise. One of these devices is used where the telephone line has been tapped and it possesses great merit in that means are provided whereby the telephone number which is dialed may be determined by the person listening in.

The other invention is known as "The Radio Eavesdropper" and, with it, no direct connection with the telephone line is required. It operates by picking up the conversation by electrical induction and is small enough to be readily carried about. It has the appearance of a radio set. This device will also make audible a conversation carried on in another room, by means of an especially sensitive microphone which is placed against the wall, or a door, of the room. Its merit lies in the fact that it will pick up conversations by telephone, or not by telephone.

—*John Berry.*

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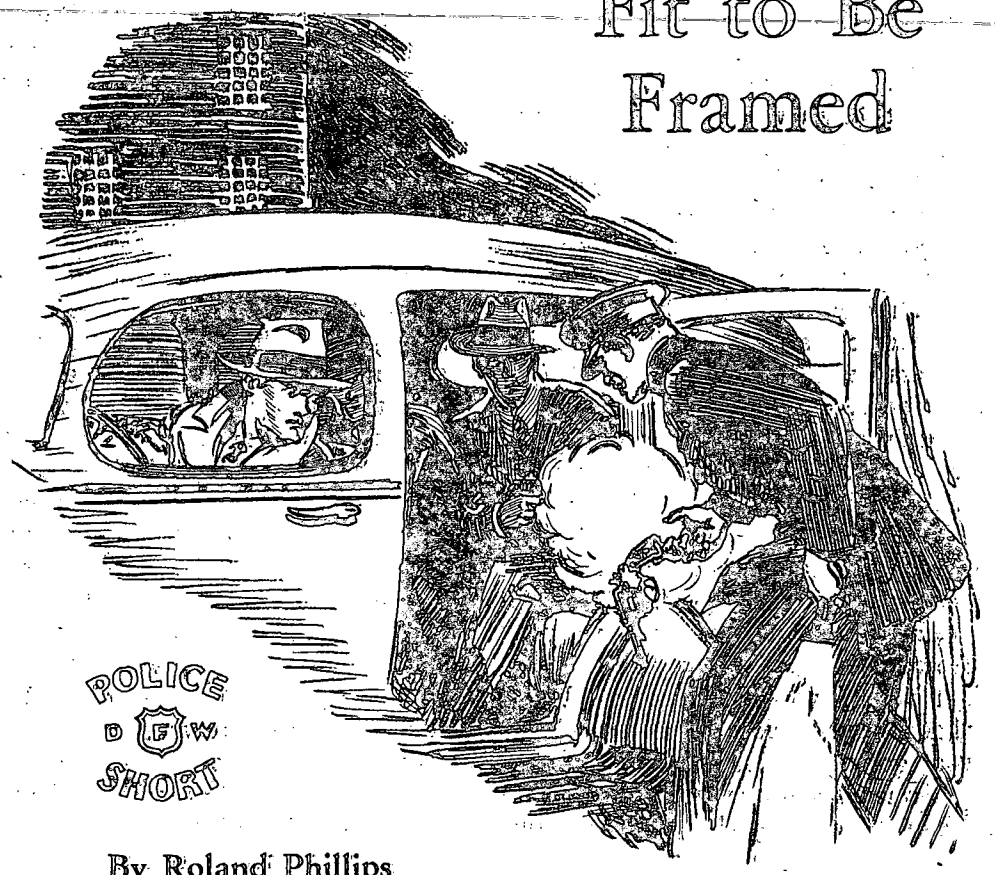
Fit to Be Framed



"Here's my card. Take it!"

By Roland Phillips

JERRY SULLIVAN parked his little sedan at the curb in front of the Ajax Café, got out, heard his name called softly, back-tracked to a doorway to behold the lean form of Detective Clem Brower.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, and stuck out a hand. "On the job again, are you—and back pounding pavements!"

"With both feet," the detective responded. "Only one of 'em's a bit game. Except for that I'm as good as new. Takes more'n a couple slugs to lay me away—you know that."

Honest Jerry Sullivan Had to Help in the Slickest Job Ever Pulled—and He Had to Find an Even Slicker Way Out

Sullivan peered into Brower's thin, lined face, noted the added stoop to his shoulders, and shook his head. "You ought to be camped by the fire with pipe and slippers. You don't look so hot. Why not rest at home?"

"They've been trying to keep me there," Brower grumbled. "But I wouldn't stay put. I'm not ready for

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the shelf yet. I've got work to do before I quit."

Sullivan knew what he had in mind, but did not refer to it. Everybody in the district knew.

"Things have been pretty quiet since you were away," he said. "I guess the bad boys are waiting for you to show up before touching off any more fireworks."

"They can start right now," the detective came back. "I'll be waiting for 'em on the line. . . . You see Lew Kibbler recently?"

Sullivan nodded, having anticipated that query. "He was asking about you just the other day."

"Yeah? Know what that slick-haired mug had the gall to do? Sent me flowers at the hospital. The louse! Needn't mention having seen me," Brower added. "I want to run across him when I won't be welcome. That's what I need to close my book. That's what got me out of bed."

It was all of three months now since Brower had stopped a car—and two slugs. The lead had dropped him, but he emptied his revolver after the car as it sped away, got its license number, and the police were hot on the trail by the time the detective reached the hospital.

The car belonged to young Andy Reed, whose father ran a drug store in the neighborhood, and Andy was found dead back of the wheel, a few blocks from the shooting; but those who had been riding with him were gone.

There had been two men in the back seat, and Brower swore one of them was Lew Kibbler. The suspect was jugged before morning, and released before noon. There was nothing to hold him on except the detective's suspicions and unsupported testimony.

That always had been the rub where Kibbler was concerned; the police couldn't produce enough evidence, couldn't pin anything on the wily crook. He never lacked an iron-clad, puncture-proof alibi. He was as smart as the mouthpiece that always defended him.

"Never been able to make out how Andy Reed came to be driving that punk," Brower said, once the unpleasant subject was brought up. "A nice, respectable kid if there ever was one; and I'm knowing him and his family the past dozen years."

The thing had puzzled Sullivan as well. There had been countless rumors, theories, contrary opinions. In the merry game of cops and robbers, the district took sides, expressed themselves freely. But Andy Reed was beyond talking, and those who might have told the facts kept mum. So the riddle hadn't been solved.

"Andy's folks won't even see me," the detective continued, aggrieved. "They're bitter, and a lot of others are holding with them. Because one of my bullets got the kid, they're calling it murder.

"Demanding the commissioner make an example of me. Claiming I'm too free with a gun."

Some of the newspapers were riding Brower as well, Sullivan reflected, especially those antagonistic to the city administration.

"I'm thinking it's dope that Kibbler's running, along with his other rackets," the detective pursued. "The Federal boys are snooping around, but they haven't got anywhere. Maybe I'll beat 'em to it. Around this section's the hot spot. That's why I'm gambling on Kibbler having a finger in it. If I had a better pair of legs. . . . Hello, here's Lew now."

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A CAR rolled up to the curb and parked. A tall, good-looking, well-groomed young man hopped out, flipped away a cigarette and walked briskly into the café. There was an arrogant swagger to his stride, an insolent air of cocksureness in the tilt of his gray fedora.

Brower looked after the man with a growl deep in his throat. "Hasn't changed much," he observed. "Business must still be good. But I see he's driving the same old can."

"Best make on the market for its price," Sullivan declared. "I been driving them for years."

"Thought Lew would get himself a fancy chariot before now. Something to match his snappy clothes and income. Maybe he's laying off the splurge, saving his dough. Huh!" Brower spat disgustedly and started away. "I'll be seeing you, Jerry. Don't keep your ears plugged, if you know what I mean. I want to finish this job before it finishes me."

Sullivan watched the detective limp off and felt a sudden twinge of pity for the man. A good egg, a square-shooter, Clem Brower; a loyal friend since the days he wore harness and chased the neighborhood boys for throwing stones. Getting on now, bucking an ugly game; a target for unjust criticism, but still full of fight and grimly resolute in his purpose.

Turning into the café, Sullivan hoisted himself to a tall stool and ordered his supper. It was late and the place was empty. The Ajax was a popular hangout. Nick Economos, the pot-bellied Greek who ran the establishment wasn't wholly above reproach, but he served good grub and cheap.

Jerry Sullivan had a neat little business of his own, was getting out of the red, and not paying tribute as were some of the others he knew; hadn't been approached, either. Sometimes he wondered at his luck; and sometimes he rather doubted the stories told him.

He knew that "protection" was one of Kibbler's many rackets; knew a great many things that Brower might have liked to hear about. He couldn't very well help knowing it from the loose talk that went on around the garage. Nobody seemed to care much what Sullivan heard. It was almost as if he was considered "inside"—which he wasn't.

There had been more than one killing, more than one pineapple tossed in the neighborhood.

Sullivan practically had grown up with Lew Kibbler, but had drifted away after their brief school days. When he opened his garage, Kibbler gave him his business, paid promptly. He wasn't turning customers away on moral grounds. He did the best work he could, took fair pay. The bulls never got a scrap of information out of him, and the opposition fared no better.

Jerry Sullivan was twenty-two, husky, red-headed and perpetually cheerful, in overalls and out of them. He knew automobiles and their ailments like the back of his well-scrubbed, freckled hand. That hand was polishing off the last crumb of apple pie, when Kibbler appeared in a rear doorway and beckoned.

"COME inside," Kibbler invited, as Sullivan strolled toward him. "This is Doc Fulton," he introduced, nodding to a short, heavy-set man with glasses who was playing solitaire at the table in the back room. "Meet Jerry Sullivan, Doc. One of

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the kid friends. Operates the best little garage in the precinct."

Kibbler grinned and thumped Sullivan's shoulder. Fulton looked up absently and said he was pleased to meet the newcomer.

"You can do me a couple favors, Jerry," Lew said. "To begin with I want you to tune up my bus tomorrow. And second, I've got a date at nine. Maybe you'll wheel me and Doc over."

Sullivan squinted through the smoke of his cigarette. "What about a taxi?" he inquired.

"No more than a mile from here," the other continued, as if he had not heard. "Won't take ten minutes."

"I've got a date of my own," Sullivan said. "Important."

"Listen," Kibbler came back. "It isn't what you think. This is pure social."

Sullivan shook his head. "Sorry. I'm due uptown right now."

Kibbler's white fingers drummed on the table and he leaned forward. "I been laying off you," he said quietly. "You're making a little money and things have been running smooth. It mightn't last."

Sullivan didn't reply. He knew what the other was getting at. It didn't make him feel any too good, but he tried to smile.

"Things happen around here," Kibbler resumed. "Accidents. You might do me one favor in a lifetime. It'll save you worrying."

"Is that the way it stands?" Sullivan challenged.

"We'll let it go at that."

Kibbler talked calmly enough and his faint smile was disarming, but there was menace in his tone, a threat that wasn't to be laughed down. Sullivan seethed inwardly. The man expected him to do his bidding—or else. No need to ask what. An "accident" would play havoc in the shop. Everything he owned was there, all paid for now.

"You needn't be seen leaving with me," Kibbler said, "if that's what's fretting you. I hear old Brower's back on the job again. I don't want him on my tail even when I'm paying a social call. I'll mosey out. You and Doc hop in my car, pick me up around the corner—Jackson's place. In five mintues."

He took his hat off the rack, adjusted it carefully, opened a side door and closed the door behind him. Sullivan sat stiffly in his chair, looking at Fulton, his mind spinning. The very abruptness of the thing left him sick at heart. Maybe this errand meant something, maybe not; but he didn't like the approach. It smelled of trouble. Driving Kibbler wasn't Sullivan's idea of a pleasant evening. He was in a jam, all right, with trouble at both ends.

Suddenly he recalled the Andy Reed episode and his pulse quickened. Perhaps Red had been in a similar jam.

Doc Fulton swept up his cards and spoke. "Let's get going."

Without a word Sullivan got out of his chair and followed the man through the side door beyond which Kibbler had passed five minutes before. The dark areaway led onto the street.

II

DETECTIVE BROWER was not in sight. Perhaps he had shadowed his quarry. Perhaps, Sullivan found himself thinking, if he told Kibbler that Brower was in the neighborhood, and looking for him, the trip might be called off.

As they crossed the walk a rash plan whipped into Sullivan's mind. He

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stopped to light a cigarette, to give himself time to consider the perils the step entailed. Better keep his mouth shut about Brower. No use bringing up that subject just now. An hour or two later things might be different.

He picked up Kibbler at the appointed spot. The man got into the back seat with Fulton and promptly issued instructions. Brower wasn't to be seen. Sullivan turned several corners and headed obediently for the river. No car appeared to be following them.

The night was misty, the scattered lights pale blobs of yellow. The streets along which they wound were deserted. The asphalt ended abruptly and the car began jolting over cobblestones. Sullivan picked his way carefully, his thoughts mutinous. There was no doubt in his mind now as to the nature of the excursion and the risks involved.

"Right here!" Kibbler called presently.

He slid out of the car almost before it stopped rolling. "Douse your glims, but keep your engine turning. I'll be right back."

Sullivan obeyed, watching the man glide off into the shadows. Fulton remained in the car, silent, apparently uninterested. The occasional cough of the idling engine and the remote toots of distant river boats, were the only sounds.

A light showed beyond in the murk, winked out quickly as if a door had been opened and closed. Tense, interminable minutes dragged. Then Kibbler reappeared. The package he carried was tossed on the floor of the car.

"Only one?" Fulton queried irritably.

"That's all tonight. Delay somewhere." Kibbler climbed in beside his companion, closed the car door softly. "On your way!" he snapped in Sullivan's ear.

Sullivan flipped on the lights, eased in the clutch, profoundly grateful to be starting back. But as the car glided forward, a sudden voice issued from the shadows.

"Hold on!"

A stalwart copper appeared ahead of them. The gun in his hand showed plainly under the glowing headlights. Kibbler swore thickly. Sullivan's fingers went cold on the wheel and on the gear shift as he brought the car to a stop.

He recognized the officer, and so must have Kibbler. It was Bob Hanson, a rookie no more than a month on the force. A big, raw-boned youngster in a new uniform. The three had played as kids together, their families neighbors on the same block.

Sullivan waited in an agony of suspense, his heart thudding.

The officer strode to the car, yanked open the tonneau door, peered at the men inside. It was too dark to distinguish faces, and Hanson fumbled for his flashlight. Sullivan did not turn.

He knew that the instant the torch flared, the package on the floor seen, the passengers recognized—

"What you doing around here?" Hanson demanded. He seemed to have trouble extricating his flashlight; he was slow, undeniably nervous.

"It's all right," Kibbler responded quietly, his voice disguised. "Perfectly all right. Here's my card. Take it!"

He was nearest the door, and fired twice as the light flashed into life. The gun must have been in his fist all the time. The reports were muffled, flat, like the thump of a hand on wood. The torch clattered to the ground.

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THE copper lurched with a gurgle, fell forward, his head striking Kibbler's knee. The latter cursed, lifted his knee and the man slid back through the door. His shoulders struck the running board, hung there. Kibbler lowered a foot, gave the body a thrust. It rolled limply upon the cobblestones and lay there with white, upturned face. The torch continued to burn, throwing a finger of light across Hanson's uncovered head.

"Get the hell out of here!" Kibbler snarled. The gun, still warm, was jammed into Sullivan's neck. "Step on it!"

Sullivan needed no second urging, no spur to goad him into flight. The gears whined, the car fairly leaped ahead under a flood of gas. It skidded perilously around the first corner, straightened out and raced over the cobblestones.

"Okay," Kibbler said, after they had covered several blocks and were on asphalt again. "Ease off a little."

The gun was out of Sullivan's neck now, but his hands were clammy, his face wet with perspiration. The thing that had happened was so monstrous, so revolting, that he shook from the horror of it. It showed up Kibbler for what he was: a vicious, cold-blooded killer who should burn for this night's work.

"Pull up this side of the café," Kibbler directed, as they came within sight of it. "Out of the light."

Sullivan obeyed mechanically. Fulton climbed out, glanced warily up and down the street, took the package and ducked into the areaway. Kibbler alighted and moved up to where Terry sat behind the wheel.

"Sorry I had to throw lead," he began. "But it had to be Hanson or curtains for us. Don't start fretting, kid. The bull's erased and we're in the clear. Run along now and keep your date."

But Sullivan locked the car and got out. "I'm in no hurry," he said. "I could stand a drink."

Kibbler smiled. "Sure. Come in and I'll buy."

They walked side by side along the dark areaway. Sullivan's knees were shaky and his feet didn't seem to track so well. Once he stumbled and fell against Kibbler; caught himself and went on.

"Say, you look like a ghost," Kibbler declared, once they were in the deserted back room. "Pull yourself together!" He opened the door into the café, caught Nick's attention and held up three fingers. Doc Fulton came down the stairs, empty-handed. Sullivan decided the man occupied one of the rooms above, had cached his package there.

Dope, Detective Brower had intimated, and it might have been, but Sullivan hadn't paid much attention. It didn't matter now. It was murder that concerned him, that Kibbler must answer for.

Nick waddled in with the drinks.

"Anybody been around?" Kibbler demanded.

"Nobody," the proprietor answered. "It's been quiet."

Kibbler nodded approvingly. "Good. We've been parked here all evening. Remember that."

"Since supper — playing cards," Nick said and grinned.

Sullivan welcomed the drink; it warmed his stomach and quieted his jumpy nerves. He couldn't get the picture of Hanson out of his mind, the last glimpse of him sprawled on the wet cobblestones with the light shining on his white face. Only yesterday the

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rookie had talked with him at the garage; had been so proud and happy in his new uniform. Now he was gone. It left Sullivan cold with rage, a sense of abject helplessness.

KIBBLER looked himself over critically, and Fulton followed his example. Then they sat down at the table, the cards between them. Sullivan did not stir in his chair, did not speak. He watched the men and the cards they dealt, marveling at their calm.

Hell would be popping soon. Swift and relentless would be the vengeance of the police when one of their comrades had been cut down. Brower would be quick to suspect and act.

"Say!" Kibbler exploded presently. "Either pull yourself together or scram! You give me the jitters squatting there with a dead pan. Come out of it, kid! If some dick barges in—"

The rear door opened and a thin, putty-faced man, breathing hard, slid into the room.

"Listen, Lew!" he gulped. "Thought you'd want to know. That bull didn't croak soon enough. He spilled the license number."

Kibbler's eyes narrowed. "Sure of that?"

"I was there listenin'," the newcomer hurried on. "A watchman stumbles over the copper just after you pulls out. I'd heard the shots, suspected there'd been trouble, but I wasn't showin' myself. I let the watchman do the investigatin' and call me. Another bull charges up, and I was right on the spot, playin' dumb, when the plugged copper babbles. He kept repeatin' the number over and over like a busted record. Then the ambulance rolls up and the doc works over the guy, but he's gone then."

"Funny, ain't it?" Fulton said. "If the watchman had stayed away a couple more minutes the copper would have been cold and the police be wrestling with a mystery. It's them little things that's always upsetting apple-carts."

The man in the doorway bobbed his head. "Sure; that's right. Just a couple more minutes. . . . Whose car was you usin', Lew?"

Kibbler nodded casually toward Sullivan. "His."

The three eyed Sullivan. He sat white and rigid, his heart thumping queerly, staring past the men. The thing that happened wasn't wholly unexpected.

"A tough break, kid," Kibbler said finally. "You'll have to blow. You'll have a good hour's jump on the cops. Take them some time to check back on the tag."

The informer, who must have been the man, from whom Kibbler secured the package, backed through the doorway and disappeared. Obviously he preferred to be elsewhere.

Kibbler eased a roll of bank notes from his pocket, skinned off several, tossed them upon the table. "This'll help. Get out of town and lay low for a while. "I'll keep you posted."

"I don't want your money," Sullivan said.

"Don't be a sap! You'll need some jack before this blows over. And better leave your bus."

"I'm leaving it."

Kibbler gathered up the currency. "If that damned watchman had held off snooping, you—".

"You need lessons in shooting," Sullivan gibed. "You didn't get Brower three months ago and you didn't shut Hanson's mouth soon enough tonight."

"And I didn't use my own bus either

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time," Kibbler retorted. "I usually look far enough ahead."

Sullivan's voice remained steady. "One of these days somebody's going to look just a little further ahead, Lew. And put this in your book. Sometimes a cat's paw can scratch."

"Aw, stop preaching!" Kibbler grimaced. "Start traveling. And don't get any funny ideas in your head." He got to his feet. "Understand? If you're bagged, you'll burn. Squealing won't save your face or blast me. It'll be your word against mine—and I'll have a flock of witnesses. Put that in your book, sap!"

Sullivan rose slowly from his chair, his fists knotted, undismayed by Kibbler's threat.

"Got any more advice to offer?"

"What you stalling about?" Kibbler snarled. "I'm trying to help you and you stand there gabbing. Shake a leg out of here. You give me a pain in the neck."

"Maybe this'll cure it," Sullivan responded.

III

HIS fist shot out, landed on Kibbler's jaw. It was a solid blow, backed by a husky arm and toughened knuckles. The surprised victim grunted, thudded against the wall and slid to the floor. Fulton bounded halfway out of his chair, but prudently sank back again.

For a moment Sullivan contemplated the sprawled form, then strode across the room, opened the door and banged it behind him.

It was raining a little now, and the pavements glistened under the myriad street lights. Clem Brower would not be outside in this weather, Sullivan reflected, and promptly set a course for the detective's nearby apartment.

In the back room of the Ajax Café, Kibbler slowly picked himself off the floor, spluttering oaths, a hand clapped to his bruised and swollen jaw.

Nick appeared. "W-what's happened?" he stammered, alarmed by the picture that greeted him.

Between outbursts of profanity, Kibbler told him.

"And get a load of this," he rasped, leveling a finger at the gaping proprietor. "If you're quizzed, you haven't seen Jerry Sullivan since supper. Stick to that. He never was with us, and we haven't been off the premises. That register?"

The Greek's beady eyes filled with understanding. "Sure."

"I'd have poked that bozo," Fulton growled, "only I didn't want to start any more rumpus. I might have laid him out, but we'd have had him on our hands, and that wouldn't be so sweet if a dick blew in. The farther away he gets, the better."

"He's scared stiff and he's going to travel fast," Kibbler declared. "He'd better. He knows he can't clear himself. The cops will find his car. They'll find blood on the running board. I saw it there. And I slipped my rod under the seat, after wiping off the fingerprints."

"Neat work," Fulton approved.

"Experts can tell from a bullet what gun it was shot from," Kibbler added.

Fulton chuckled. "You're plenty smart, Lew."

"Well, I keep looking ahead all the time—just in case. Shoot us a couple drinks, Nick. And don't forget what I told you."

IT was half an hour later that Detective Brower limped into the café pressed on into the back room where Kibbler and his companion were peg-

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ging a game of cribbage. Two hefty uniformed officers were with him. The Ajax proprietor, slipping from behind his cash register, tailed at their heels.

The first thing the officers did was to fan both highly indignant card players. Neither was armed, which occasioned no surprise on the part of Brower and his somber henchman.

"What the hell's the big idea?" Kibbler demanded, after the brisk ceremonies were over. "You all hot and bothered again?"

"Hot but not bothered," the detective replied.

He squinted at Kibbler's swollen jaw that had taken on a rich purple hue, and grinned a little.

"You lads been cooped here all evening, I suppose?"

"And still," Kibbler snapped.

"Seen Jerry around?"

"Who?"

"Jerry Sullivan," Brower repeated.

Kibbler looked surprised. "Haven't seen him for a week."

"He come in tonight to eat supper, hurry away," Nick volunteered quickly. "About eight o'clock. He got off in his car."

The detective nodded, as if that bit of testimony was highly gratifying. "I saw him come in about that time. Thought maybe he'd stuck around."

"Not with us," Fulton attested.

"That's good," Brower said. "Just wanted to be sure. I'd hate to see him running with you lads. Been together all evening?"

"All of it," Kibbler answered. "Why? Something happen?"

"Something happened," Brower said. "You took a little spin over to the East Side tonight, picked up a parcel and lugged it back here. And you put two slugs into Bob Hanson."

"You're cuckoo!"

"And since you and Doc have been together all evening," Brower went on, "he must have been on the party. Just the pair of you."

"We haven't been off the premises," Kibbler maintained. "Ask Nick."

"Sure; that's right," the Greek corroborated. "The boys they—"

"You," Brower shot at the Ajax proprietor, "clear out!"

Nick lifted his hands, shrugged and reluctantly vanished.

"The rookie cop's dead," Brower stated. "But he lived long enough to give us the license number of the car he tried to stop."

"Yeah?" Kibbler smirked. "So what?"

"They make up a full house, Lew. Three aces and a pair of treys. Maybe it sounds familiar."

A flicker of apprehension crossed Kibbler's stony countenance and his eyes narrowed. "That's my tag, all right, but—"

"I didn't need to wait to have it checked," Brower explained. "It's been easy for me to remember. It's been stamped on my mind for a long, long time. That's why I'm on the job so quick."

Kibbler glowered. "Rot! You're either trying for a frame, or that cop pulled a boner. My bus has been parked out in front here since I landed before eight o'clock."

The detective shook his head. "Wrong. It's half a block up the street."

"Up—the street?" Kibbler repeated blankly. "Why—"

He broke off short to flash a look at Doc Fulton, whose red face was beginning to show a gray pallor. The first prickling of an appalling truth filled him with panic.

"We've been inspecting the car,"

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Brower continued placidly. "We find blood on the running board and a rod tucked under the rear seat. A thirty-eight, with two cartridges exploded. When we get the slugs out of Hanson—"

"You—you're crazy!" Kibbler exploded. "You're trying to make a lousy frame. You can't get away with it."

"You can't get away from it," Brower retorted.

KIBBLER dared not look again toward Fulton. He glowered at the detective and the two grim officers. Jerry Sullivan had tricked him! He remembered that his car, and Sullivan's, were identical in make, model and color. The latter had stepped boldly into Kibbler's parked machine and driven off. Fulton hadn't suspected, nor had Kibbler himself when he climbed in later.

Brower went on speaking. "They were thirty-eight slugs that dropped me three months ago. I knew whose gun they came out of all right, but I couldn't locate it. I've found it now. You winged me, and you rubbed out Andy Reed so he wouldn't blab. You—"

"But I tell you—I tell you my car—I left it out front," Kibbler choked. "If it's moved—I didn't know."

Brower seemed to be considering a new angle. "You think some one might have borrowed your bus—pulled the job and hoped to slip you the blame?"

"Yes, that's it!" Kibbler pounced upon that alluring suggestion. "That's just what happened. The car wasn't locked. I left the keys in the switch."

"They're gone now," Brower said. "The car's locked."

"Locked?" Kibbler wet his lips. "Then—then the rat using my car must have taken the keys with him."

"Somebody took 'em," Brower agreed. "Maybe you've forgotten. About locking the car, I mean. We sort of do that automatically, you know," he added, smiling. "Suppose we take a look."

He stepped up and frisked the man, his nimble fingers dipping into Kibbler's pockets. The latter submitted quietly.

"What's this?" the detective queried. From an outside coat pocket he had extracted a narrow, worn leather case. Inside, on a ring, were two keys.

Kibbler fell back, goggling at the evidence that had been plucked from his pocket like a rabbit from a magician's hat.

"Look like ignition keys to me," Brower observed complacently, scanning them. "They sure do. We'll soon find out."

Kibbler opened his mouth but no words came. Unmistakably they were his keys. And now, vividly, he recalled Jerry Sullivan walking beside him along the dark areaway, stumbling against him, pawing at his coat. Of course! A ruse to transfer the keys!

Even more vividly he recalled Sullivan's pertinent comment: something about a cat's paw scratching.

Hot, raging oaths tumbled from Kibbler's lips. He shook from impotent fury. "It—it's a frame!" he screamed. "A lousy frame, I tell you!"

"Never mind erupting," Brower cut him short. "You're sunk, Lew. You've had it coming a long, long time. . . . Take the pair away," he barked at the officers. "I'll be along presently. Want to prowl upstairs a bit first, rout out the parcel you boys cached."

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" Where's Steve Steele?" Tim demanded savagely

Dead Men Tell Tales

Conclusion of Six Parts

By Fred MacIsaac

What has happened—

STEPHEN STEELE and Private Detective Tim Cody had been roommates and close friends back at old Eli Evans School in Providence, so that when they met in New York after a lapse of years, the two young men decided to have a reunion and talk over old times.

Steve, who is the wealthy grandson of old Jonathan Steele, multi-millionaire owner of the Steele Motor Company, takes Tim to meet the glamorous Rhoda Robinson, an actress whom he had met a short while previously on the boat coming from Europe. Rhoda and Steve are devoted to each other, and Steve decides to fly to California to tell his irascible old grandfather of his engagement to Rhoda.

A few days later the newspapers announced in screaming headlines that Jonathan Steele's grandson has been murdered. Tim and Rhoda are broken up over the news of his death—which, according to the newspaper accounts, had happened amid unsavory surroundings in the Los Angeles negro section. Rhoda wishes to at-

Honor, Friendship and Millions Were at Stake! — And Tim Cody Was Willing to Give His Life, Battling the Most Amazing Conspiracy of These Hectic Modern Times

This story began in *Detective Fiction Weekly* for September 5

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tend the funeral, but the Steele family, believing that she is an adventuress, denies her the privilege. Tim has a hunch that the whole case is phony, and decides to spend the legacy of ten thousand dollars which Steve had willed him in finding out the truth. He suspects that Steve is still alive and so he flies to Los Angeles to investigate.

On arriving in Los Angeles, Tim is met by two city detectives. Having had a "tip" that he is a tough guy from New York, they tell him they have orders to run him out of town. Tim phones Richard Barton, an attorney, a relative of Steve Steele's personal lawyer, for legal help. He comes immediately to Tim's hotel and puts the squeeze on the two flatfeet, who apologize to Tim. Barton learns from them that it was a Mr. Rogers of the Steele Company who had given the orders.

Barton listens to Tim's ideas about the murder, and Barton, on the spur of the moment, decides that they should make a call on old Jonathan in Santa Barbara. He phones his sister, Clarice, a charming and witty girl, to pick them up in her car and drive them out.

After an hour of fast and furious driving, they arrive at the Steele estate, scale the surrounding wall, and are just about to enter the mansion, when they are met by guards who break up their little party. During the scuffle Tim thinks he sees the face of Steve at one of the upper windows. By overpowering the gate keeper, they manage to leave the estate unapprehended, and return to Los Angeles.

Barton tells Tim that even if Steve is alive, they still have a huge fight on their hands, for Steve is now legally dead. Barton phones Parker B. Blake of the Steele Corporation, who requests that Tim have a talk with Lafe Morton, the personal representative of Patterson, President of the Steele Corporation.

Acting for Mr. Patterson, Lafe Morton, alias Giovanni Maroni, advises him to give up his activities in the Steele case for fifty thousand dollars—or else! Tim flatly refuses. Later, from a surprising source—the chance remark of a hotel bellboy—Tim learns that the man who, for a time, was Steve's impostor, had a missing finger joint on one hand, and that it had been shot off in a gambling joint in Las Vegas, near Boulder Dam, Colorado. Tim makes a quick trip to Las Vegas for an investigation, and discovers that the impostor's name is Ambrose J. Adamson of St. Louis, whose body must have been substituted for Steve's at the funeral.

On returning to Los Angeles, Tim tries to get in touch with Barton, who has been shot by an unknown assailant. Convalescing at the Emergency Hospital, visitors are denied to him. Later, Tim has a conversation at his hotel with Mr. Patterson, loses his temper and blurts out that he knows Steve is still alive. Soon after, Tim is picked up by gangsters in Patterson's pay, brought to a cheap hide-out, where it looks as if he is going to get the heat.

Maroni orders his henchmen to take Tim safely to Chicago, where he is to be killed. They leave Los Angeles and head across the desert where they run into a spring blizzard. Tim manages to escape during the confusion of the storm, and is nearly frozen when he passes out.

In the meantime, Barton, the lawyer, has recovered from his wound. He uses Clarice to lure Maroni to a private dining room and with assumed righteous indignation breaks in upon them and forces Maroni to go to the Barton home where he receives a good beating. Soon after, Maroni's pals, having trailed him, break in on the Bartons, and the tables are turned. Clarice and Barton are to be taken to "The Castle," Maroni's headquarters, but they contrive to escape.

Tim wakes up to find that he is being well taken care of in the farmhouse of "Maw" and "Paw" Piper. He drives back to Los Angeles in a truck driven by Jim Bridgeman and the two immediately call on the Bartons.

CHAPTER XXI

Two Volunteers

"IF we're beaten off," Tim told them, "and captured, we'll get long jail sentences, so we won't be beaten off. We'll go in force. Jim Bridgeman is an old service man and would take any chance for a few hundred dollars. From what he tells me

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of his brother, he'll join us. Four determined armed men in a surprise rush."

"Tim, come to my arms," cried Dick.

"Five," cried Clarice. "Count me in."

"My dear young lady!" exclaimed Upton Reynolds. I'm ashamed to put it down, but Clarice stuck out her tongue at him.

"You're out," snarled Dick. She stuck out her tongue at him.

"Yes, you are, Clarice," I said.

Her eyes filled with tears. "Can't I drive the car?" she asked plaintively.

"No," I shouted. To my surprise she began to sniffle and then ran out of the room.

Reynolds was on his feet. "I can't countenance this," he cried. "It's insane."

"Take your hat and go for a walk," said Dick insolently.

The old boy's face grew red. He swallowed and then he spoke mildly. "What purpose will be served?" he asked me.

"We'll carry off Jonathan."

"Where will you take him?"

"To the Soldiers' Home to be fingerprinted," I said with a laugh.

Dick embraced me. He pumped my hand. "A stroke of genius, but—if he turns out to be Jonathan—"

I hummed a bar of the prisoner's song and he joined in.

"I'll have no part in this. I've a mind to report you to the police," exclaimed Reynolds.

"Are you going to, sir?" I inquired.

"No, damn it," he replied and left the room.

"Rhoda," I said gently. The girl was sitting there very pale but with very bright eyes. "We'll bring back Steve if we can."

"I know you will. I'll pray for you," she said softly.

"Let's go find this truck driver and his brother," Dick proposed. "First let me get you some decent clothes. Mine will be a trifle big for you, but not too much."

That seemed sensible, so I went up to his room and changed clothing. Dick had produced a revolver and an automatic pistol and several boxes of cartridges. We went downstairs. The big car was in the driveway and Clarice sat in it. She was in black and her chin was thrust out. "I go with this car," she said firmly.

Dick winked at me. "Okay," he said. "Has Jim got a gun?"

"He had two on the truck."

"He struck me as a nice fellow. What's the address?"

I gave his brother's address and Clarice started the car. We were off upon the first lap of the wildest, maddest adventure of my brief career. Inside of me I was scared. I looked at Dick. He was a perfect picture of a radiantly happy man.

"I'm not welshing," Clarice called back after a minute, "but why storm this fortress? Why not lay in wait for Jonathan when he goes to play golf—it would be much easier. You know how I can outdistance pursuit."

"Because," replied Dick, "Jonathan won't stick his nose out of his castle for some time. If he recognized you, found out you were the sister of Cody's attorney and fled Palm Springs on that account, he'll stick close to the home fires. And how long do you suppose our friend Maroni will let us lie in wait? Tonight is ours. He doesn't know yet that Tim got away from the gang who were driving him to Chicago. He's probably sleeping in his bed at the Biltmore tonight. So, sister!"

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Clarice laughed. "Okay, Chief."

"Tim," he said to me. "Just what arguments are you going to use on the two men to induce them to turn bandit?"

"Well, I'll offer them money, tell them there won't be any comeback."

"You let me talk to them," he demanded. "If they have any sense your proposition won't appeal to them."

"Let me vamp 'em," suggested Clarice.

"You'll keep out of this," said Dick fiercely.

While we were still chattering we drew up in front of a seedy apartment house away over on the south side of town and I got out and rang the bell of what was ostentatiously styled Suite Four . . . name Bridgeman.

"Tim Cody," I called up the tube. "Is Jim there?"

"You bet." The door clicked and I pushed it open to be joined immediately by Clarice and Dick. We climbed three flights of stairs and met Jim in the hall.

"Hello, folks; say, this is an honor." He grinned at Clarice in open admiration. "Hey, Bill, put your coat on," he bellowed. "Swell company."

BILL BRIDGEMAN was a second edition of Jim except that his nose was flattened on his face and he was bigger, which made him gigantic. He had his coat on when we entered. It was a dingy apartment, the sort you can get for twenty dollars a month in Los Angeles.

Jim introduced us. Bill looked impressed.

"You ain't Richard Barton, the district attorney?" he demanded. "Why, I voted for you."

"Thanks," said Dick, who met his grip with one equally terrific. "I resigned a few months ago. Too many crooks smelling up the place."

"Say, you got a nifty sister," declared Bill, eying Clarice with so much ardor that I began to bristle.

"Do you two guys want to make some real dough?" I demanded.

"Sure," they said simultaneously. "How much and what for?" demanded Bill.

"A thousand dollars apiece for a few hours' work," said Dick Barton. "Steady, boys, while you get the dough anyway, you might have to do a stretch in San Quentin."

"You wouldn't make us do anything crooked, Mr. Barton," protested Bill. "A thousand bucks!"

"I seen his house," stated Jim. "Swell joint. I guess he can pay big money, if he says he will. What's the proposition, sir?"

"Sit down, everybody," suggested Dick. "We intend to right a great wrong by illegal means. I need two-fisted guys who aren't afraid to shoot off a gun. Tim says both you fellows are ex-service men and not afraid to take chances. This is the situation. If we pull off this job successfully, we're heroes, we're within the law and nobody can touch us. If we foozle it and happen to kill somebody, all of us might be hanged."

"Listen," said Jim Bridgeman. "You're a political spellbinder. Well, I like Tim Cody or I'd turn thumbs down on this. But you got to tell me and Bill exactly what we're up against or we'll tell you what to do with this thousand apiece you're talking about."

"That will be all for you, Dick," said Clarice maliciously. "Let Tim tell 'em. They like Tim."

Dick laughed with some embarrassment and nodded to me.

"Jim," I said, "I didn't tell you

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how I came to be in that farmhouse. Well, I escaped from a car full of Chicago gangsters who were taking me to Chicago to be put on the spot. We're up against gangsters tonight."

The two big fellows looked at each other. Both grinned.

"What we're going to do is rush the house of Jonathan Steele in Santa Barbara and capture Jonathan. Ever hear of him?"

"Who hasn't?" asked Jim.

"IF we can carry him off, we're in the clear because he isn't Jonathan Steele at all but an impostor named Tommy Donnegan. We can prove that if we have him in our hands. He is guarded by a mob of gangsters who'll shoot to kill. If we get beaten off or captured, as Dick says, we'll go to jail. If somebody has been killed, we'll hang."

"How you going to prove this and what good will it do you?" asked Bill.

"His grandson is my best friend. If a faker is posing as his grandfather, he is being kept out of one of the biggest fortunes in America."

"Why don't this guy do his own dirty work?" asked Bill pertinently.

"Because he's a prisoner in their hands. You see why we can afford to give you fellows a thousand each. Dick Barton and I will be with you—we take every chance you take. Dick is his lawyer"—I stretched a point there—"and I'm his pal."

"Wait a minute, this Steele's grandson was murdered, wasn't he?" said Bill. "I read it in the papers."

"We can prove that he wasn't. It was a man named Adamson."

They didn't say anything. I stood up. "Well, Dick," I said, "I don't blame the boys for turning us down. It's an awful risk. Let's go."

Jim jumped up and pushed me back into my chair. "What have we got to lose?" he demanded. "They give the prisoners good chuck in San Quentin. What I could do with a thousand bucks! I'm with you, buddy."

"That goes for me," said Bill. "If we're up against gangsters, we shoot to kill, eh?"

"Of course," said Dick. "We can prove who they are and get three rousing cheers for eliminating them—if we get safe away with this fake Jonathan Steele."

"Wait till I get an overcoat and my artillery," requested Bill Bridgeman.

He politely offered his arm to Clarice, who took it with an amused smile at me.

"What are we going to do about her?" I whispered to Dick as we brought up the rear.

"We're going to maroon her," he told me. "You can't argue with her. I can't trust her even to sit in the car while we go inside. That kid would be on our heels. So, at Malibu, where she knows a dozen people, we're going to stop the car and put her in the road."

"She'll never forgive us."

He laughed kind of funny. "I think she'll forgive you, all right. And time will temper her fury against me."

BILL BRIDGEMAN had climbed into the front seat beside Clarice. Jim sat with us in the back seat on the left side. He was silent and puzzled, not sure we weren't crazy, probably dubious of the outcome of our enterprise, but ready to take his chances for a fee of a thousand dollars.

"Queer how a key clears up a profound mystery," said Dick gaily. "We're deadlocked, a chance remark

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by Clarice is caught up by you, and in a minute the whole blamed cryptogram has been solved. With Donnegan in our hands, the enemy has to surrender—all that was inexplicable is clear as crystal."

Clarice glanced back. "Great brain," she inquired, "when and if we lay hands on Jonathan, where are we going to take him? Of course you haven't considered that at all."

I looked at Dick and he looked at me, and we both laughed. We hadn't got around to consideration of that.

"I have a key to Stella Grey's cabin in Tiger Cañon north of Santa Barbara," she said. "Nobody goes up there at this season and there are no neighbors within a quarter of a mile."

"The very place," cried Dick. "Just where is it?"

Clarice laughed merrily. "Don't you wish you knew? You two boys allowed me to come without protesting enough. Well, if you're planning to get rid of me, reconsider. I'll guide you to the cabin."

Dick scratched his ear. "That's what we're up against," he said. "All right, jail will be a nice place for you, Clarice. But you have to swear you'll stay in the car. No following us over the wall."

"If you don't agree, we'll call this whole business off," I exclaimed. The thought of Clarice going to jail was horrible. I couldn't stand it.

"You bet your life you ain't going in with us, lady," spoke up Bill Bridgeman. "We take risk enough without watching out for a dame."

"All right, I'll stick with the car," she said reluctantly.

"You promise, Clarice?" I asked eagerly.

"Yep."

About eleven-thirty we drew near the estate in Montecito. We drove past the private road about two hundred yards, came to a turnout at the right, and Clarice drove the car off the road and turned out the lights. We got out, looked to our weapons and to Dick for orders. Clarice descended and stood quietly. Suddenly she threw her arms around her brother's neck. He lifted her clear off the ground as he kissed her. The pair certainly liked each other.

Clarice shook hands with Jim and Bill and then came to me. I felt shaky, all of a sudden.

"Tim," she said very softly, "please be careful—for my sake. Don't be rash, darling."

There were tears in her eyes. And, for the first time, I had the idea that—maybe—Clarice thought of me as more than a pal of her brother's. I hadn't taken the kiss she gave me when I arrived at the house seriously. She was always exuberant and of course she was delighted to see me back. But now. I pounced on her, lifted her up and kissed her.

She kissed me back fiercely and then she said sharply, "You put me down, you big lug."

I dropped her like a hot cake and said, "Excuse me," very humbly.

Clarice laughed loudly. "Oh, don't mention it," she replied, and hopped back behind the wheel of the car.

"Come on, boys," ordered Dick.

We walked toward the estate across lots.

"We'll go over the wall," he said, "creep up to the lodge and nab the gate keeper and tie him up. That will fix our getaway. We'll find out from him where Maroni's boys hang out, surprise them, if we can, and then bust into the house. It's as good a plan as any."

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IT was better than what I could suggest, so we all agreed. We worked through thick shrubbery and a park of trees and came to the wall. We got over by the same method that had served us the first time, but instead of heading boldly for the big house, we worked along by the wall until we came to the lodge. It was a small bungalow and there was a light in one of the rooms.

Dick softly tried the door, but it was locked. He risked ringing the door bell. We heard footsteps and then the door opened. A gray-haired man peered at us and emitted a terrified squeak when he looked into the barrel of Dick's automatic. He was not the gate keeper that Dick had held up on our first visit.

"Anybody inside?" asked Dick harshly. The man shook his head.

"Get back." He retreated, trembling. We pushed into the room—the door opened directly into the living room. I sized him up as a regular servant, not a henchman of Maroni's. So, apparently, did Dick.

"Sit down," commanded Dick. "We won't hurt you unless you make trouble."

"I won't make any trouble, mister," he promised.

"How many servants at the house?"

"Seven, sir."

"How many women?"

"Just the housekeeper and the cook."

"What are the others?"

"Mr. Steele's valet, Mr. Farrell, the secretary—he has a valet and there is the footman, the butler and the chauffeur."

"How many sleep in the house?"

"They all do, sir."

"Doesn't the chauffeur sleep over the garage?"

"No, sir, on account of the detectives. They are quartered in the rooms over the garage."

"How many of these 'detectives' are there?"

"Six, sir. They are very necessary—an attempt was made to rob the house a couple of weeks ago, but they drove off the robbers."

"How long has Mr. Steele employed these detectives?"

"Well, there were two ever since I've been here, but the others came about a month ago, at the time young Mr. Steele was killed in Los Angeles."

"How long have you been with Mr. Steele?"

"About ten months, sir."

"How many of the detective patrol the grounds—they work in shifts, don't they?"

"Yes, sir, two at a time, four-hour watches. You see Mr. Jonathan is so rich—"

"Never mind. Now we're going to tie you up and put a gag in your mouth, but we're not going to hurt you. You'll be released very shortly."

"Look here, Mr. Barton," the man alarmed us by exclaiming, "you can't do this. I voted for you for district attorney a year ago in Los Angeles. You ain't going to tie and gag me. I'm an honest man. I protest."

"Bill, go out in the kitchen and find a rope," said Dick. "I hate to trouble a man who voted for me, but sometimes the law officers have to do unlawful things. The end justifies the means."

"What are you going to do?" asked the terrified servant.

Dick gave his crazy laugh. "Right a great wrong, Pop. Lay down while we do what has to be done. That your bedroom? Well, I want you to be comfortable. Lay down on your bed."

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Still protesting, the unlucky constituent of the ex-district attorney was bound and gagged.

"I don't think this is going to be so tough," Dick told us. "We'll try to reach the garage without bumping into the pickets, catch these birds together, overpower them, then fire a shot which will bring the two watchmen, knock them over and go up and knock on the front door of the house."

"Meantime, Jonathan might make a getaway," I objected.

"He has to use a car, and we have the garage," he countered. "Come on, boys."

WE went outside. The moon was not up yet, but there were lights in the second story of the house and lights on the second floor of the garage. We moved carefully in the latter direction.

"Some one coming," warned Jim Bridgeman. We fell flat. A man was coming down the driveway toward the lodge.

"Can't have that," whispered Dick. "Get him, Tim."

I crawled on hands and knees to the edge of the driveway. I saw him only fifty feet away. I waited. When he was almost opposite me I made a dive tackle and struck him with my shoulder at the knees. They didn't teach football in the school he went to and he didn't know how to relax. When I got up, he didn't. The fellow's head had struck the concrete and he was out cold.

I pulled a big revolver out of the side pocket of his jacket and was joined by the others.

"Lots of time," said Dick. "We'll park him in the lodge, tied up with the old man."

He came to as we were entering the lodge, but a word of warning kept him quiet. Five minutes later we set out again. "Only five," said Dick. "It's a cinch."

This time we arrived at the garage without encountering anybody. There was a small door unlocked and we got inside. Dick had a flashlight and we located the stairs.

"Take off your shoes," he whispered. We obeyed, and with Dick in the lead we started up the stairs. At the head of the stairs there was a door with a wide streak of light beneath it.

A voice said loudly, "No good, I have three aces."

"Poker game, what a break!" muttered Dick. We threw open the door.

Four rough-looking men sat around a table.

"Royal flush," shouted Barton. "I win!"

We had them covered. Their cue was to lift their hands. Instead, one of them fired point blank at Dick Barton. He fired too quick and missed, and I winged him. The Bridgeman brothers plunged in. There followed as hard and sharp a scrap as I ever got into. A dozen shots were fired at such close range that most of them missed. Fists and butts of guns came into play. I was rolling on the floor with a burly thug who got his gun against the pit of my stomach but whose skull cracked against the floor before he could pull the trigger.

After three or four minutes the battle was won. Three of the enemy were unconscious and one was dead. And Bill Bridgeman had a bullet in his left arm.

I suppose twenty shots were fired during the battle and enough noise was made to wake the dead.

"Disarm these yeggs and leave them," commanded Dick. "Ah!" He

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turned as a man rushed into the room, gun in hand.

"If it ain't Jake!" exclaimed Dick. "Stick 'em up, Jake."

Jake, true to the gunman code, fired, but my right foot had got into action. I kicked the revolver out of his hand and Dick floored him by bringing his fist with the automatic in it against his temple.

"Can you travel, Bill?" he demanded.

"This ain't anything," replied Bill, but he grimaced with pain.

Dick was plunging down the garage stairs. We followed. We raced across the grounds and up to the front door of the house. The ground floor was all lighted up.

Dick was thumping on the front door with the pistol. "Open up," he roared. The door did not open. Dick fired a shot through the glass panel beside the door. The glass made a horrid jangling sound.

"Open up or I'll burn the house down," he bellowed. We heard a chain being dropped and the big door flew open. In the hallway stood two men, fully dressed, an old man and a middle-aged one. A butler was there. On the stairs were two half-dressed women servants.

CHAPTER XXII

Tiger Cañon

"WHAT'S the meaning of this outrage?" cried the middle-aged man furiously. "How dare you break in here? Who are you?"

I thrust my gun against his middle. "Where's Steve Steele?" I demanded savagely.

"He's dead, you fool. Put up that weapon. What do you want—money?"

Dick had the old man by one arm. "You're coming with us," he shouted.

"I'll be gosh blamed jiggered if I am," cried the old fellow. "Leggo me. If I had my rifle—"

Dick was dragging him, protesting, toward the door.

"Dick," I pleaded, "we have to find Steve."

"We've no time to search the house," he shouted back. "We've our ace right here. They'll have to release Steve."

"Up those stairs," Jim Bridgeman commanded of the butler, who scampered up in great haste.

"You, too," I growled to the secretary, for that, obviously, was who he was.

"I tell you, you're mad. That's Jonathan Steele. Kidnaping is a capital offense in this State." He had the nerve to make a grab for my gun, so I swung my left to his jaw and dropped him. I was the last out of the house. Bill Bridgeman, with his good hand, had a grip on Jonathan's left arm while Dick was dragging him along by his right arm.

"I'm eighty-two years old. I can't run so fast," he protested.

"You're lying by ten years," retorted Dick. "Step on it."

We made the lodge without interference. Dick turned Jonathan over to Bill Bridgeman, rushed into the lodge, and in a moment the great gate swung open, operated by mechanism from the house.

I'd had a good look at the old man in the lighted hall of the residence. He was a frail old man with snow white hair, clean shaven, with high cheek-bones, a small, thin-lipped mouth and a pointed chin. He looked pretty much as I remembered Jonathan upon the occasion when he had visited the

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school ten years back. I grew weak around the gills to think what would happen to us if it was really Jonathan.

Dick rushed out of the lodge and our flight was resumed. We already heard shouting from the vicinity of the house.

Jim Bridgeman was half carrying Jonathan because he couldn't run as fast as the rest of us.

"Farrell thinks it's kidnaping," called Dick with a laugh.

"What in tarnation is it, if it isn't kidnaping?" quavered Jonathan.

"You'll be surprised, old top," Dick retorted. "Damn it, we have to run a couple of hundred yards up the road. No, we don't."

For, as we emerged into the highroad, there stood the big car with Clarice at the wheel. She had heard the shots, backed the car down to the entrance to the private road, and our getaway was fixed. She sprang out of the car.

"Hello, Tommy Donnegan," she exclaimed.

"You made a mistake, I never heard of him," he cried shrilly.

Jim was boosting him into the car; we scrambled in. We heard the sound of a motor up the private road, but Clarice was under way.

"Clarice," called Dick, "stop at a hospital at Santa Barbara and let Bill Bridgeman off. He's wounded in the arm. How do you feel, Bill?"

"I'm not going to any hospital," he growled. "I'm all right."

"But he'll be arrested," protested Clarice.

"He'll be all right. We've won," exclaimed Dick. "Say nothing, Bill. Tell them to fix your arm and go find out how you got shot. By tomorrow we'll all be on top of the world."

Dick and I had Jonathan between us. I could feel the old fellow shaking with fright. I was almost sorry for him until I thought of Steve.

WE tore along the boulevard into Santa Barbara. Clarice slowed as we hit the main streets of the brightly lighted city; she began swinging into the side streets and back to the main streets and she suddenly stopped before a brightly lighted hospital building.

"Make it yourself, Bill?" asked Dick.

"You bet," said that doughty invalid as he opened the door of the car with the good arm and stepped out.

"Keep mum. You'll hear from us tomorrow."

We were off and turned into the highroad to San Francisco. It's a long straight road which finally reminds you of a roller coaster because there are so many short steep hills to climb and descend. Clarice took it at breakneck speed. We had gone fifteen miles when she gave an angry exclamation.

"I'm out of gas," she said. "Why didn't some of you think to get gas?"

"Why didn't you? You were driving!" retorted Dick furiously.

"Can I think of everything, you big boob?"

"Stop at the next station and fill up the tank. We'll take the chance of their catching up with us."

A couple of miles along we ran into a big gas station and I saw a Pay Station sign, and I had about the smartest idea of my life, though the others didn't think so at the time. I rushed into the shack, called Los Angeles and the Ambassador Hotel, and asked for Rhoda.

She answered almost immediately. At that hour all lines were clear.

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"We've got what we went after, Rhoda," I said.

"Steve?" she cried joyfully. My heart sank. I'd forgotten Steve for the moment.

"No, the other one. With him in our hands we'll have Steve free in twenty-four hours. We're going to a cottage in Tiger Cañon owned by a friend of Clarice's named Stella Grey. Tell Reynolds it's all over but the shouting."

Dick was roaring for me from the car, so I hung up.

"Who were you talking to?" he demanded angrily. "You held us up."

"Rhoda," I said. "I had to tell her."

Clarice looked back at me. She was glaring. "Oh, you did!" she cried. "So you're crazy about her. Well, she loves Steve, Mr. Timothy Cody."

"Step on it," shouted Dick. "They're probably right on our heels."

"Let 'em come," growled Jim Bridgeman.

Six miles farther along we entered the mountains. At the end of a couple of miles Clarice turned up a dirt road and began to climb a steep grade. She turned into a driveway a short distance after that and stopped before a large one-story establishment which was dark.

"Here we are," she said triumphantly. "I don't think they can trace us to this place."

We dragged Jonathan out. He hadn't spoken a word for a long time. In fact, if he had been eighty-two years of age he would have died from heart failure on account of Clarice's driving.

She unlocked the front door, turned a switch and the place was electrically illuminated. For a cabin in the wilderness it was modern, and elaborately furnished.

Jonathan stood inside the door, a picture of dejection.

Dick inspected him and suddenly barked, "'Tenshun!"

The old man's heels clicked together, his chin lifted, his arms straightened at his side, the little fingers touching the hems of his trousers. Dick roared with laughter.

"Old soldier," he said, "you know your stuff."

"You might as well 'fess up, Tommy Donnegan," said Clarice, smiling broadly.

Jonathan shifted to at ease. "I ain't saying nothin' to nobody," he declared.

"Jim, take him into a bedroom and stay with him," commanded Dick. "You're responsible for him. If he gets away your brother will do a term in jail—and the rest of us."

"Come, Grandpa," said Jim gently. "You ain't going to force me to bust your skinny old neck, now are yer?"

"No, siree," replied Jonathan, who toddled off with Jim, and Clarice and Dick and I remained alone.

"Now what's the program?" demanded Dick with a deep sigh. "Everything has gone so smoothly that I'm scared."

"We get him to the Soldiers' Home in the morning, take his fingerprints, and have all the officers of the place and all the inmates identify him."

"I suppose so. After that Patterson can have him back and welcome. Blessed if I know why they dug up this old codger from a Soldiers' Home and christened him Jonathan Steele."

"I don't suppose there were many men to be found at short notice who looked like Jonathan," I said slowly. "Come to think of it, it was smart. Here is a man who has been buried in an old soldiers' institution for a quarter of a century. Before he went in

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there he had never amounted to anything. Inmates of Soldiers' Homes never come out. The employees of the Home don't circulate in millionaire circles. There wasn't a chance in a million of his ever being recognized."

"You're right. Only how did Patterson know there was a double of Jonathan in that Home?"

WE couldn't answer that question. Dick rose. "We don't want to be caught as Jonathan was, so I'm going outside to stand guard. I'll leave you two love birds flat." He laughed mockingly and went out of the place and slammed the door.

"Your face is red," remarked Clarice. "You have a round face, so when it's red you look exactly like a half of watermelon."

"Yeh? What did he mean by that crack?" I asked uneasily.

"That," said Clarice, "was satire."

I chewed on that. I looked over the big living room we were sitting in. There was a grand piano and Oriental rugs and large overstuffed chairs.

"Nice place your friend has here," I remarked.

"Very," she said dryly. "I wish I had a mashie."

"What for?" I asked, bewildered.

Clarice stood up. Her eyes were blazing. "To sock you over the head with, you chunk of something," she screamed. "Of all the dumb clucks!"

I eyed her thoughtfully. "Does Dick think you and I are in love?" I asked bluntly.

"No," she snapped. "He knows that you are a clod of mud and you couldn't be in love except maybe with a turtle."

Clarice was exceedingly angry and she certainly was good to look at when she was angry.

"Then what does he mean?" I persisted.

"He thinks that I am in love with you, you dolt," she shouted.

"Well, are you?"

She stamped her foot and she laughed scornfully. "Do you think I'm crazy?" she demanded.

"Yes," I replied. "Frankly, I thought so from the first time I met you. You're about the finest girl I ever saw in my life and the best looking and you've more nerve than any other girl and more brains, so you couldn't be in love with me unless you were crazy."

"Is that so?" she exclaimed. "What's the matter with you, for heaven's sake?"

I got up and took a couple of steps toward her. She saw something in my eye and she backed away.

"You keep off," she threatened.

"I never thought you'd give me a tumble, Clarice," I told her. "I didn't think you meant anything by kissing me tonight."

She bristled. "So, you think I'm promiscuous with my kisses," she exclaimed.

"Aw, shut up," I yelled and I pounced on her. I got a fist in my right eye but after that she just nestled in my arms.

Bang! It sounded like a shot.

Dick bounced into the room.

"A car was coming toward the house," he exclaimed. "They trailed us. I fired a shot to warn them off and they backed out in a hurry. Clarice, you go in and entertain Tommy. Send Jim out here. Looks like we're in a mess. Put out all the lights. Keep a gun on Tommy—he's a cute one."

Clarice and I had broken apart, of course. She rushed into the bedroom. Jim came barging out and we turned

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out the lights. After that we opened the door and slipped outside. The moon was up.

THE house was on top of a slope and its driveway turned into the dirt road about fifty yards away and ten yards below. There were Eucalyptus trees blocking the view and a lot of boulders and the car had put out its lights and wasn't visible.

We lay flat on the edge of the porch and watched closely. I thought I saw a man run from one boulder to another thirty or forty yards away and fired. Answering shots came from three spots and one broke a window.

"A mess, all right," said Dick. "I think the way we came is the only way out. We're besieged."

"There can't be many of them," I said. "Unless they called the police."

"I don't think they'd dare. With Jonathan out of their hands they don't know what he might have told us. They'll try to get him back, shoot the caboodle of us and accuse us of having kidnaped him and get acquitted of murder by any court. Well, they'll have to fight to get him back."

"You said something, Buddy," declared Jim.

An hour went by; two hours. We fired an occasional shot. They sniped at us. They broke two or three windows in the house. The night very slowly passed. Dawn came with us three squatting on the porch. Occasionally Clarice called softly to us from the window of the bedroom and we answered her. We knew that nobody had worked up the slope but it was possible they might have climbed the cañon walls and got around behind us.

As it grew light we saw a car down the cañon blocking the road to prevent us making a dash for it but we couldn't see our enemies, who had plenty of cover.

Our position on the porch being too exposed in broad daylight, we retreated into the house and watched from windows front and back. The cliff at the back of the house was almost precipitous but we stationed Clarice at the back window of the bedroom where Jonathan was confined. Jonathan had crawled under the bed when the shooting first started and remained there.

We expected a rush but none came. Clarice opened some cans she found in the pantry and made coffee. Sniping had completely ceased.

"If they expect to starve us out," Clarice said gaily, "they're batty. There are supplies enough here for a month."

"They're waiting for someone," declared Dick.

"Lafe Morton, most likely," I said gloomily. It was nine o'clock. Ten o'clock. Nothing had happened but we were nicely bottled up. If they brought up men enough they could rush us and recapture Jonathan. I was in an awful state on account of Clarice.

"We can't fight it out," I told him. "On account of her."

"I know it. God knows I didn't want her along."

"We'll fight it out," declared Clarice. "And we'll win. He broke down and admitted he was Tommy Donnegan when the shooting started last night."

"That's no good. We won't be around to testify—even if we surrender, I'm afraid."

"Did he tell you how he got into this?" I asked Clarice to change a horrible subject.

"It's weird," she said. "It seems that ten years ago, Mr. Farrell, who was Mr. Steele's secretary, was a clerk

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in the office of the Soldiers' Home. When Jonathan died, he remembered that Tommy Donnegan looked a lot like him and he called at the home and offered Tommy fifty thousand dollars and the chance to live like a king for the rest of his life. You can't blame the poor old thing for accepting the offer."

We laughed. I looked at my watch. It was ten o'clock.

Bridgeman from the front window called out. "I see a car coming. It's stopped down there. Six men are getting out. Look, they're coming out of hiding, one, two, four, five of them."

"Eleven to three," said Dick. "We'll make a good showing."

"One of them's coming up, waving a white handkerchief," called Jim. "How about it?"

We were all at the window. "It's Maroni," I exclaimed.

"I recognize him," Dick said grimly.

"Let me go out and meet him," I pleaded.

"Go ahead. We won't accept anything he proposes, of course."

So I walked down the slope. Maroni recognized me, stopped in his tracks, and then came on.

"How are you, Joe?" I asked cheerfully.

He gazed at me with a poker face. "So you got away from the boys. I thought as much."

"Cinch," I said airily. "What's on your mind, Joe?"

"Turn him over," he replied. "Let him walk down this hill and I'll take my boys back to Santa Barbara."

"You mean when there's no danger of hitting him, you'll rush the house," I came back. "Who do you think you're talking to?"

"I'll give you my word, Cody. I keep my word whatever else they say about me."

"I don't take your word, Maroni. We can stand you off. Ever hear of the Battle of Bunker Hill?"

"I don't go in for history. Turn him loose and we'll let you go. You've a dame with you. We don't want to hurt her."

"You don't intend to let any of us go. Start your war, Maroni."

"Okay," he said with a scowl. "If Steele gets hit — well, he's lived to a ripe old age. I'll be right back, Cody."

"I'LL save a slug of lead for you," I promised him. He turned his back on me—more than I would have done with him—and walked down the slope. I ran back, zigzagging. Sure enough a couple of bullets came flying by. Dick fired a shot at Maroni but he was out of range. I told them the proposition and they all laughed.

"Let 'em come," said Jim Bridgeman. "I won't get the thousand but I've had a lot of fun."

"Put it there," said Dick. "So have I."

"And I," declared Clarice.

I didn't say anything. I had a horrible pain in my heart when I looked at Clarice.

The gang below had spread out and began a dropping fire from behind rocks. We had sixty or eighty cartridges between us which ought to last as long as we'd need them. We decided to hold our fire until they made the rush.

It was a long time in coming. I could see Maroni moving round out of pistol range and apparently having trouble getting the boys nerved up to running up that slope.

He finally did what I didn't think he had the nerve to do. He led the charge.

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They came up slowly, darting from boulder to boulder and hiding behind the thick trunks of the Eucalyptus trees. Dick and Jim took pot shots at them but didn't hit anybody. I waited. I was waiting for Maroni if he gave me a chance.

I had him spotted behind the nearest tree. It was about three hundred feet away. A long shot. I crouched there with my eyes just above the window sill figuring out where he'd next take cover. There was a boulder about twenty or thirty feet nearer the house and the same distance from his tree. He doubled over and made a run for it. I fired two shots and one of them knocked off his hat but he reached the boulder.

The others were creeping up and lots of bullets were coming through the windows and the stucco walls of the flimsily constructed if pretentious bungalow. One man lay stretched out in plain view. I don't know who got him.

Maroni's next move would be to a boulder twenty-five feet from his present rock and twenty feet closer. I trained my gun that way. He darted out. I fired, missed, he was half way, and the second shot got him. He pitched forward and lay flat on his face.

"Got Maroni," I shouted. "He's through for the day."

"For life, by the looks of him," called Dick. He fired as he spoke. "Damn it, I missed," he exclaimed.

Jim fired two shots. "By Jiminy, they're running away," he yelled. "We-e-e-e!"

"There are cars coming," called Clarice. "I can see three cars away down the cañon."

"The police," said Dick glumly. "Out of the frying pan, into the fire."

I nodded. "This may be a deserted cañon but the battle going on here must have been heard for miles."

The enemy, in fact, were retreating down the cañon. They clustered by their car. The procession of cars coming up halted below the parked car and men with rifles piled out.

I saw one of Maroni's band approach the riflemen. I saw him gesticulating wildly to the leader who paused and talked with him.

"Well," said Dick. "No sense in fighting the State of California. It's jail sentences instead of death." He thrust his automatic in his pocket.

"They're disarming Maroni's men," cried Clarice shrilly.

"Of course," said Dick. "They had no authority to wage war. But it's only a formality. Patterson will take care of them."

LEAVING three riflemen to guard the Maroni outfit deprived of its weapons, the remainder, eight or ten in number, came steadily up the grade and turned into the private road. Dick and I and Jim stood in the center of the living room looking at each other despondently.

"Dick, Tim," screamed Clarice. "Upton Reynolds is with them. Look!"

We rushed in a body out upon the porch, forgetting our prisoner. It was all right because nothing would have induced him to come out from under the bed.

The party halted forty feet from the porch and a big burly mustached man stepped forward.

"You are under arrest," he shouted. "I'm the sheriff of this county. You are charged with abducting Jonathan Steele."

"It's a lie," called Dick. "We have a man here who has been impersonat-

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ing Jonathan Steele. Fetch him, Jim. Come up, gentlemen. We are law-abiding citizens. We've been besieged by gangsters. We have any citizen's right to defend himself."

The sheriff, accompanied by Upton Reynolds, who looked incongruous in a mob of rough, armed men, came forward.

"How are you, Upton, old top?" inquired Dick with his usual impudence.

Upton gravely shook hands with Clarice and Dick and me. "Let me introduce Colonel Edwards," he said. "Colonel Edwards is superintendent of The Soldiers' Home at Sawtelle."

"Miss Barton," exclaimed that gentleman, who was middle aged, mild looking and as uncomfortable in his surroundings as was Reynolds, "this is a most astonishing situation."

"Here he is," exclaimed Jim Bridgeman. He appeared, dragging the prisoner by one arm.

"By Jove," exclaimed the Superintendent. "It's Tommy Donnegan! Why, you old rascal!"

Tommy's faded eyes widened, his legs began to shake but he clicked his heels together and made a military salute.

"How are you, Colonel Edwards?" he asked with a deprecating smirk.

There was a burst of laughter from the sheriff.

"Donnegan," said Reynolds loudly, "do you confess that you have been impersonating Jonathan Steele?"

"I didn't want to do it," pleaded the old man. "Mr. Farrell was the one. He made me do it, sir."

"I—I must sit down," gasped Upton Reynolds. "Your arm, Cody. Lead me to a chair."

I took him inside and he flopped upon a chair. He pulled out a big handkerchief and wiped his brow and then he looked up at me with twinkling eyes.

"I HAVE imperiled my reputation, perhaps my liberty," he said, "by staking everything upon a crackbrained theory. I have been in a state of mortal terror since leaving Los Angeles, since last night when Rhoda phoned me your message. I didn't really believe that it was Donnegan—and, if you had abducted Jonathan Steele, all of you would have got a long term of imprisonment."

"If you're responsible for the arrival of the sheriff and his posse, you saved all our lives, sir," I told him.

"Of course I'm responsible," he said testily. "I rose at seven this morning and motored down to the Soldiers' Home. I persuaded Colonel Edwards, against his better judgment, to accompany me to Santa Barbara. If he hadn't thought there was something queer about Donnegan's departure from the Home, he wouldn't have budged.

"I went to the Sheriff of Santa Barbara and told him—well, I made flights of the imagination sound like facts. What persuaded him to investigate was that no report of the abduction of Jonathan Steele had been made and when he phoned to Steele's residence it was absolutely denied that Steele had been abducted. He collected deputies and we started for this place."

"But what made you think we were in danger, sir?"

"It was obvious, if the ring around Jonathan hadn't reported his kidnaping, it was because they hoped to recapture him. And it meant that it wasn't Jonathan Steele but Donnegan you had carried off. Now it happens that the men employed as private detectives by Steele, in their off hours have incurred the enmity of the police

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of Santa Barbara. The sheriff of the county said he would be very glad to catch them taking the law into their own hands.

"Well, when we turned into this cañon we heard heavy firing going on—it seems that we were just in time. Did you find Stephen Steele?"

"No, sir. We had no time to search the place. We are sure that, if we have Jonathan unmasked, Patterson will have to have Steele released."

"Well, well, I've never before risked my professional reputation on such a long shot," he said. "Cody, there is a phase of this situation that probably has not occurred to you. Whether Stephen Steele is dead or not, we know he was alive a month ago."

"Of course, sir."

"Then, since it appears that Donnegan has been impersonating Jonathan for a year, Stephen inherited the entire Steele fortune."

"That's right."

"And you and Miss Robinson were willed all the goods of which he was possessed. It's possible, Cody, that you own ten per cent of the Jonathan Steele holdings in motors and other corporations." He gazed at me whimsically.

I almost fainted. Fifty million dollars would be ten per cent of that vast estate. Then I drew a deep breath. "I'd rather have Steve alive," I told him. "And furthermore, he is alive. And I was robbed of half my five thousand dollars."

In came the sheriff and Donnegan and Dick and Jim. Clarice came up and took my arm.

"I got my man, Mr. Reynolds," she said. "Though I practically proposed to him."

"You did not," I said indignantly. "I reached out and grabbed you."

"Huh!" said Clarice. Dick whooped with laughter.

"You've been right so far, Mr. Reynolds," said the sheriff. "What's the next move?"

"Since Donnegan accused John Farrell, Steele's secretary, of having arranged this impersonation, the next move is to arrest him before he learns what happened at this place."

"I'll phone from the nearest place to have him nabbed and brought to the District Attorney's office."

CHAPTER XXIII

The Great Conspiracy

THE District Attorney of Santa Barbara County sat behind his desk. There were present Dick Barton, Upton Reynolds and myself. Tommy Donnegan was under guard in an outer office. John Farrell was being given the works.

The secretary of Jonathan Steele was a heavy set man of forty-eight or fifty with black hair touched with gray. He had large well-shaped features, hard gray eyes and a solid jaw. He was pale but composed.

"You have heard the case against you," said the District Attorney. "These gentlemen took the law into their hands. If they had failed in their enterprise they would be sitting where you are. I'm aware that you took orders from Roscoe Patterson of New York. I'll do what I can for you at the trial if you come clean. You know the jig is up. We don't actually need your testimony. The facts are damning enough. Use your own judgment."

"I'll talk," said Farrell. "I never thought we'd win out. I was forced into this. I want to say here and now that no murder was ever contemplated by Mr. Patterson or myself. We were

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victims of accident—we were the puppets of economic conditions."

"Afraid I don't get you," said the District Attorney.

"I'll explain. Mr. Steele died of a heart attack on Feb. 28th, 1935, a few days after our arrival here from Detroit. I phoned Mr. Patterson in New York. He said to conceal his death. He would fly out immediately and take charge."

"You mean there was no attending physician?"

"He died in the night. I discovered his death, phoned immediately and received my orders. I at once discharged his valet, who had been with him for some years. I let nobody enter and remained in the room with the body for twenty-four hours until Mr. Patterson arrived.

"Mr. Patterson was in a frightful state. He said that Jonathan's death at this time would bankrupt the company, ruin himself and hundreds of thousands of people—that death and inheritance taxes would pick the carcass of the Steele Corporations clean. 'The market is in such a state that liquidation will probably cause a general panic and throw national recovery back for years. If there was only some way we could carry on for six months. It would give me time to prepare, to arrange things,' he said.

"I told him it was impossible. That concealing a death was a felony. 'That's of no consequence,' he said. 'Jonathan Steele can't die; he mustn't be allowed to die. Farrell, if we could get somebody, an actor — somebody whom we could hedge around, let people see him at a distance. Farrell, how would you like to make a hundred thousand dollars?'

"'Very much. How?'

"'I don't know. It ought not to be hard to find a man who could do it. His grandson is in Europe and I'll arrange that he stays there. Get rid of everybody in this place who knows him. I'll have a doctor come from New York, a nurse—he's ill—see. We'll confine him to his room.'

"While he was talking I had—well," he smiled faintly—"it seemed an inspiration at the time. Some years ago I was a clerk at the Soldiers' Home in Sawtelle and there was a veteran there who looked a little like Jonathan Steele's pictures. I had remarked about it once to him and he was quite tickled. I remembered that we had to discipline him once for stealing some money from another inmate. I told Patterson about him.

"'He might serve if he's still alive,' he said excitedly. 'Find out. Get him here.'

"Well, that's the way we fixed it. Donnegan was ten years younger than Jonathan, and healthy. Jonathan had had no personal friends for years. They had all died and he wanted no new friends. He had been practically a recluse. We installed new servants—"

"What did you do with the body of Jonathan Steele?" the District Attorney asked sternly.

"IN the dead of night, Patterson and I carried him to a boat, took him out to sea, put weights on him and dropped him overboard. I refused to do it unless Patterson went with me—I was determined he would be as deep in it as myself.

"Well," he said with a faint smile, "it worked. Donnegan was a natural actor and he enjoyed his importance. I taught him to play golf and we continued Jonathan's routine. Patterson sent a private detective named Morton to handle the protection angle."

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"You mean the gangster, Maroni," said the D. A.

"Well, he said he was a private detective. I could imitate Jonathan's handwriting and signed what documents required his personal signature. Of course, I was always worried, but nothing happened. Nobody in the world had the slightest suspicion that Jonathan wasn't alive and well.

"A few weeks ago the unexpected happened. The grandson arrived from Europe. He had inherited his mother's estate and Patterson could no longer force him to remain abroad. Patterson was much disturbed, more so when I phoned him I had received a wire from Stephen Steele that he had to see his grandfather on an important matter.

"Now I had nothing to do with what happened. It was arranged by Patterson with Lafe Morton. When young Steele arrived at Santa Barbara Morton admitted him, led him to a room prepared, overpowered and bound him and put a man in to guard him. I protested and was told to mind my own business. In the meantime a man hired by Morton was impersonating Stephen in Los Angeles. After a wild drunk he was murdered in a negro joint."

"By Morton's orders?" demanded the District Attorney.

"No, sir. That wasn't the idea. It was to give us a good excuse for disinheriting Stephen Steele—"

"If you remember, I told you so," said Upton Reynolds to Dick with justifiable complacency.

"There was nothing to do, of course, but to identify him as Stephen Steele and that brought up the problem of what to do with Steele."

"So you have murdered him," thundered the District Attorney.

"No, sir. We have removed him to a house near Palm Springs, an isolated place, until we could come to some decision.

"Being informed that Mr. Cody, accompanied by the ex-district attorney of Los Angeles, Mr. Barton, had broken into our grounds, I took Donnegan next day to the Steele place in Palm Springs. We had been there only a few days when an unfortunate incident happened. Leaving the golf links, we passed a car containing Miss Barton, who thought she recognized Jonathan as Donnegan. He told me she had been a frequent visitor at the Soldiers' Home.

"WHILE I assumed she realized she was mistaken, I could run no more risk of encountering her, so we came back to Santa Barbara. After the kidnaping of Donnegan last night, I sent the men who had been overpowered by the kidnapers in pursuit. By chance, a gas station attendant had heard one of the kidnapers tell somebody over the phone that they were going to the Stella Grey cottage in Tiger Cañon.

"They phoned the information to me and I got in touch with Morton in Los Angeles. From our angle it was vital to recapture Donnegan—out of our hands and in the hands of the police he would have told everything. Morton collected more men and started for Tiger Cañon as soon as possible. Whatever violence has occurred is Morton's responsibility, Mr. District Attorney. I was against violence from the first."

"Morton, or Maroni, is dead," declared the District Attorney. "I think you and Patterson will be found responsible for the crimes of your hirelings. Write an order to whoever is guarding Stephen Steele at Palm Springs to release him. I'll send officers

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down to escort him here." He pressed a button and a policeman entered.

"Take this man to the County Jail and lock him in a cell," he said.

When Farrell had been removed, the District Attorney passed around cigarettes. "I'll phone New York to arrest Patterson on a murder charge. We may not be able to make it stick, but it will serve to hold him despite his political influence."

"Are we under arrest?" asked Dick.

"Technically. Considering you broke and entered, killed a man, kidnaped another and shot several citizens up in Tiger Cañon, I'm treating you boys pretty well. Dick, I suppose you can be elected Governor of this State if you want to run at the next election."

"I'll take the matter under consideration," said Dick with his contagious laugh.

THERE was a dinner party at the house of Richard Barton to serve the double purpose of honoring Stephen Steele, head of the vast Jonathan Steele enterprises, and to announce the engagement of the beautiful Clarice Barton to one Timothy Cody. Though, as Clarice said, everybody at the dinner knew all about the engagement.

The guests were Steve and Rhoda and Upton Reynolds, the grand old sport, and myself, and Bill and Jim Bridgeman. Bill had his arm in a sling and both brothers were greatly embarrassed, even though, because of their point of view, none of us wore evening clothes.

Steve didn't look bad at all and hadn't had a bad time. They had fed him regularly, let him have books to read and told him nothing. He didn't know that while he was locked in a room in his grandfather's house, they were holding funeral services over what were supposed to be his remains in another part of the building. He hadn't recognized me that night he looked out the window at the fight in the grounds below because he hadn't expected to see me in California. His delight to find Rhoda waiting for him when he came back from the Castle in Palm Springs can be imagined.

Upton Reynolds was speaking. "My dear Mr. Steele," he said, "while Roscoe Patterson was a criminal of the first water, while his intentions, of course, were to rook your estate, by concealing the death of your grandfather for a year, he actually performed a great service for you."

Steve laughed in his good old way. "How do you make that out, sir?" he asked and squeezed Rhoda's hand under the table.

"A year ago, the liquidation of the estate would have failed to bring enough to equal the total of Federal and State taxes. It is not impossible that such a forced liquidation would have caused a panic.

"Thanks to the great rise in the price of all sorts of securities and particularly motors, during the past year, the Steele holdings have almost tripled in value, while the taxes must be collected upon the valuation as of a year ago plus the nominal interest rates. Thus you will net sixty or seventy per cent of the value of your properties of a year ago after taxes have been paid instead of finding your inheritance amounting to nothing or only a few thousand dollars."

"Just the same," said Steve vindictively, "it's lucky for him he committed suicide when he got the tip from Farrell that Donnegan was exposed —not because of what he tried to do to me but for his treatment of Rhoda and

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his attempt to have Tim put out of the way. Anyway I don't care about the money. Rhoda and I would get along under any conditions."

"Of course we would," said Rhoda.

Steve laughed. "This Donnegan character appeals to me. I'm going to have a talk with him. Dick, can they jail the old man on this charge?"

"They certainly can."

"But his impersonation seems to have saved me and my friends millions of dollars."

"And he's an old dear," declared Clarice.

"So I'm going to keep him out of jail and give him a pension."

Clarice rushed around the table, threw her arms around Steve's neck and kissed him. For spite, I kissed Rhoda.

AFTER quiet was restored Steve rapped on the table. "Dick," he said, "I consider that you were acting as my attorney during this whole business. So present any bill you like over a million. As for you two boys"—he turned to Jim and Bill—"I rate your services in my behalf at ten thousand each."

"Holy Mackerel!" exclaimed Jim. Bill said nothing but tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Of course," said Rhoda, "you owe everything to Tim."

"Rats," I exclaimed. "What could I have done without Dick and Clarice?"

"As a matter of fact," stated Dick Barton, "it was Upton Reynolds, that white whiskered old codger across the table, who turned the trick. First he doped out the whole plot and the motives behind it and then he raised the country and rescued us from the trap we were in. If it hadn't been for Upton, they would have murdered the lot of us, taken Jonathan back to Santa Barbara and carried on. You, Steve, would still be in durance vile."

"Mr. Reynolds, of course, will represent legally the Steele interests," said Steve. "And you will be our western legal representative, Dick."

"You've fixed us up," remarked Dick. "But what are your plans for Tim Cody?"

Steve gave me the old grin. "Tim is up against it. He is going to Detroit and enter the plant as a mechanic."

Clarice jumped up. "What's that?" she cried with blazing eyes. "Why—you ingrate—I wish we'd left you in that awful place in Palm Springs."

Dick yanked her back into her chair. "Sit down, you addlepate," he snarled.

"Let go of me, you boot-licker. All of you—lapping up bones he tosses you like a lot of hound dogs—" she cried furiously.

"Clarice," I cried sternly. She burst into tears.

"Don't you see, Clarice," said Steve, smiling, "Tim has to learn the business before I can promote him to be President of the Steele Motors Corporation—in two or three years now—" he stopped. The sun had come out on my sweetheart's face. "Why, you—you darling!" she cried.

That's the whole story as well as I can tell it. The Department of Justice at Washington had played its part by delving into the Steele Corporation's affairs.

Steve came back the same swell guy he always was. And Clarice and I are married and living in Detroit and I come home covered with grime every night and we wash up, put on the soup and fish and go stepping.

I forgot to say that on our way east with Steve and Rhoda, we called on Paw and Maw Piper. They wouldn't

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let us give them anything, but Steve paid their back taxes, bought all their stock at top prices, left a new Steele Six motor car in their barnyard and made them like it. And why wouldn't he? If it wasn't Maw's gossiping about the upstart Donnegan family where would Steve have been? And we all wouldn't have been sitting on top of the world.

THE END

Speed in Wrong Place Leading Cause of Highway Death Record

AUTOMOBILE accidents seldom result from mechanical failure. Manufacturers see to that. A modern highway is well designed and danger spots on the older highways are well marked. Engineers see to that.

But who is responsible for most of the highway accidents? It's the driver. He can reduce the number of accidents, which last year resulted in the death of 36,000 persons.

These statements are emphasized by the Bureau of Public Roads in a new leaflet, "Drive Safely!" The author, William G. Eliot, 3d, a highway economist of the Bureau, has studied the records of highway accidents of recent years. He says safe drivers live longest and let others live.

The leaflet of only four pages is full of "stop signs." It lists questions for drivers to put to themselves. It lists their responsibilities, and gives general and specific rules of the road. It has pictures that enable some motorists to see themselves as a low-flying aviator might see them in their careless moments on the highway.

Questions put to the motorist by the leaflet are: Are you fitted for driving as shown by tests? Can you keep an even temper or do you become irritated? Do you get rattled? Are you able to control that occasional impulse to act recklessly? Do you know what the law requires of you?

Responsibilities listed: Both you and your car must be properly equipped and ready for the road. Inspect car regularly, especially brakes and steering gear. Discard worn tires. Keep lights properly adjusted, so they won't glare and blind other drivers.

General rules of the road: Drive to the right when meeting vehicles or where approaching vehicles may be hidden from view. Drive to the left in passing vehicles from behind. Do not pass vehicles on crest of hill or on a curve—you may find your way blocked by an approaching vehicle. Do not reduce your speed or change directions suddenly without signaling. Keep a safe, clear stopping distance ahead of you.

The most important single cause of accidents is too much speed in the wrong place. A car traveling 40 miles an hour moves as fast as if it were falling from a four-story building. Going 30 miles an hour on the highway a car can be stopped in about 30 feet, but it takes 225 feet in which to stop it at 60 miles an hour. At a mile a minute a car moves 88 feet in a second, which means that it travels 50 feet before the driver can even push the brake pedal down.

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Civil Service Q & A

By "G-2"

Could You Qualify as—

Special Agent (G-Man)	Police Patrolman
Secret Service Operative	Police Detective
Post Office Inspector	Policewoman
Customs Patrol	Fingerprint Expert
Immigration Patrol	State Trooper
Anti-Narcotic Agent	Crime Prevention Investigator
Parole Investigator	Probation Officer
Prison Keeper	Criminologist
Internal Revenue Agent	Police Radio Expert
Alcohol Tax Agent	

This department will give you every week typical questions asked in civil service examinations.

Fingerprinting Tests

FINGERPRINTING as a means of identification is rapidly being adopted by large industrial plants, banks, insurance companies and welfare agencies. Recently the Boy Scouts of America approved a plan to fingerprint all Boy Scouts, and in various States movements are under way to compel all civilians to be fingerprinted. Thus fingerprinting is being applied to the civilian population for purposes not associated with criminal identification.

In the next few years, fingerprint experts will be in demand to fill positions not only in the civil service but also in private business. To fill these positions a man must be trained in the science of taking, reading and classifying fingerprints. Almost any child of ten may make a fingerprint, but expert skill is required to develop latent fingerprints, read them and classify them. The science of fingerprinting has advanced to such a well-developed stage that police experts are today able to read fingerprints found on fabrics.

Since this department was installed, scores of readers have written to "G-2" requesting sample tests given to fingerprint experts. Many of the readers have completed courses in fingerprint instruction and are awaiting an opportunity to take the next Civil Service examination. At present no test is pending for the Federal service, although many fingerprint classifiers are employed in government work, and doubtless more will be needed. As a matter of fact, the Federal government employs classifiers to read and classify the prints of applicants for examinations.

The man or woman who desires employment in the criminal identification bureau of city police departments would do well to understand thoroughly that, in most cities where civil service prevails, employment in the criminal identification bureau may be obtained only by passing the usual tests for patrolman or patrolwoman. Once having passed such a test the successful candidate who is thoroughly trained in fingerprint theory and practice should have no difficulty in securing a permanent assignment to the fingerprinting bureau.

In reproducing the actual civil service tests below, no answers will be provided, since the questions call for extended writ-

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ten answers of a technical nature. The questions will, however, furnish the reader with an idea of what he may expect when he goes up against a test. The position for which the test was given is officially known as fingerprint classifier, but it is obvious that an expert must be qualified to do more than classify prints. Three hours were given candidates in which to answer the following questions on duties:

Q 1—What is a fingerprint?

Q 2—What is a ridge?

Q 3—What are the names of the eight types of fingerprint patterns?

Q 4—How do you tell whether a whorl is (a) inner; (b) meeting; (c) outer?

Q 5—How many ridges appear between the delta and core of an inner loop in the (a) index finger; (b) middle finger? If an outer loop in the index finger? In the middle finger?

Q 6—How many deltas has a (a) loop; (b) whorl; (c) composite?

Q 7—What is a latent fingerprint?

Q 8—What determines the life of a latent fingerprint?

Q 9—How are latent fingerprints developed?

Q 10—What are the standard symbols used in the Henry system of fingerprints?

Q 11—In case the right and left thumbs were both amputated, how should they be classified for filing?

Q 12 $\dfrac{W\ (9)\ (10)\ CP\ (9)}{(7)\ (5)\ W}$

Above is a symbol fraction representing a set of fingerprints. The numbers of parentheses above the right index, right middle, right little, and below the left index and left middle fingers, represent the ridge count of loops in those fingers. Give the correction classification formula for same.

Q 13—What are the fixed points in impressions?

Q 14—Name five ridge characteristics.

Q 15—Why are rolled and plain impressions taken?

The practical section of the test (time limit for answering 3 hours) follows:

Q 16—Candidates will now receive ten sets of fingerprints on official cards. Mark on the line "FOLD" under each print pattern before you, for example, "A" for arch, "W" for whorl. If an approximating pattern appears, mark what you think it really is and question the other pattern it resembles; for example: W? R, A? T. Classify each print, putting the classification where indicated on the print. Do not place any other mark on any of the 10 prints. If you place any mark except as required above, you will be disqualified in the test. The time limit for classifying all ten prints, 2 hours.

Candidates were also required in the practical section of the test to take fingerprints of one person in not more than 5 minutes; to search files for five prints, 5 minutes, and filing 5 prints, 5 minutes.

Not infrequently in written tests given to patrolmen seeking assignment to fingerprint work this question has been asked candidates:

Name 15 different objects usually found in a residence or apartment which you would examine for fingerprints of the person who might have committed a crime therein.

The answer generally accepted as fully correct is (1) papers; (2) glass objects; (3) polished earthenware; (4) veneer; (5) polished furniture; (6) metal boxes; (7) locks; (8) door plates; (9) weapons; (10) leather with a smooth surface; (11) celluloid objects; (12) shells; (13) dusty surfaces; (14) tools; (15) telephone.

Another oft-repeated question: Upon what objects are to be found the most visible and deepest fingerprints? The answer: candles, wax, glazier's cement, dry glue on envelopes and postage stamps, grease, butter, salve, soap.

QUALIFICATIONS.

As a general rule, where civil service applies, the age limit for candidates for fingerprint jobs in state and city service is fixed at 21 to 44 and the starting pay ranges from $1,200 to $1,680 per annum. Since reformatories, prisons and asylums employ fingerprinting to identify inmates, most jobs are to be found in those services. The duties are to take fingerprints, classify them, search and file fingerprints in accordance with the Henry system. To pass the written tests a general average of 75 per cent is required as a minimum; 85 per cent is required to pass the practical test such as that given above.

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From time to time tests are held for executive positions such as director of criminal identification in State and city correction and welfare departments. This position pays from $2,500 to $3,250 a year. Candidates must (a) have not less than six years of satisfactory experience in criminal identification work, involving the statistical analysis and classification of fingerprints of which at least two years must have been in a supervisory capacity; or in charge of an identification unit, and graduation from a standard senior high school; or (b), a satisfactory equivalent combination of the foregoing experience and education. Candidates must have outstanding knowledge of the methods of criminal identification. In the Federal service all fingerprinting work, including that done in the Federal Bureau of Investigation, is under civil service, and the men so employed are rated as fingerprint classifiers.

THE Q & A BOX

Questions pertaining to civil service will be answered without charge. If an individual reply is desired enclose stamped, addressed envelope.

E. R. Paddock.—Jobs in the operation and maintenance of Federal dams are for the most part under civil service.

Joseph Janus.—Unable as yet to state when and where the Federal commission will hold a test for wood-carvers.

Ernestine Pine.—Yes, the Government is now filling positions on the Social Security Board (old age pensions). Last test announced was for that of legislative reference assistant, $2,300 a year to start. Previous experience in legislative reference work required.

Andrew S. Foote.—A Federal examination for criminal research statistician, Bureau of the U. S. Census, was announced on June 30. Age limit—must not have reached fortieth birthday. This is an unassembled examination. Candidates will be rated on education and experience.

F. J. C., Scranton, Pa.—If you believe you have been unjustly dealt with, and you can prove your claim to veteran's preference, present your case to your Congressman or Senator. You have a right to seek such help in the matter. By Presidential order, a preferred veteran "may be released from height and weight requirements except for a few positions."

Daniel Gilday.—You will only be wasting time and effort. Postoffice inspectors are taken from the P. O. service and must be nominated by the Postmaster General before they take the inspector tests.

Harlow Deane, Esther L. Morgan and others.—Upon receipt of a stamped, addressed envelope, "G-2" will forward a list of standard textbooks on fingerprinting and where they may be obtained.

Emory Dean, John Maloney, Stephen T. Crosby and others.—Thanks for advising that you desire booklets of sample test questions. An announcement soon will be made in this department.

Alexander H. Hulverson.—Yes, errors were found in key answers to the mathematics tests published in the July 4 issue. Some readers claimed to have found 6 errors, but the answers to 2 were debatable. Readers were cautioned not to accept the key answers as final, and advised to work out each problem. It is not likely that the same questions will be given in any future math test. A competent mathematician should be able not only to work out problems, but to detect errors; and, every so often, test Q's are given in actual examinations which call for discovery of errors in both answers and working out of problems.

Stanley Dennison.—If you are planning to take the next P. O. clerk sorting test, and want expert advice in the matter, visit your local postoffice and ask a recently appointed clerk about the sorting test he took. There is no law against asking for such information; no law against giving it.

H. E. Gillespie.—Sample tests for life guard and swimming instructor will appear in these columns in the not too distant future.

Orville M. Stanton, Ft. Worth, Tex.—Federal civil service employees who supervise the holding of written tests in various cities could hardly know in advance what questions are to be asked since the examination papers come to them from Washington, sealed, and are first opened in the examination room a few minutes before the test opens.

Next Week—Prison Work as a Career

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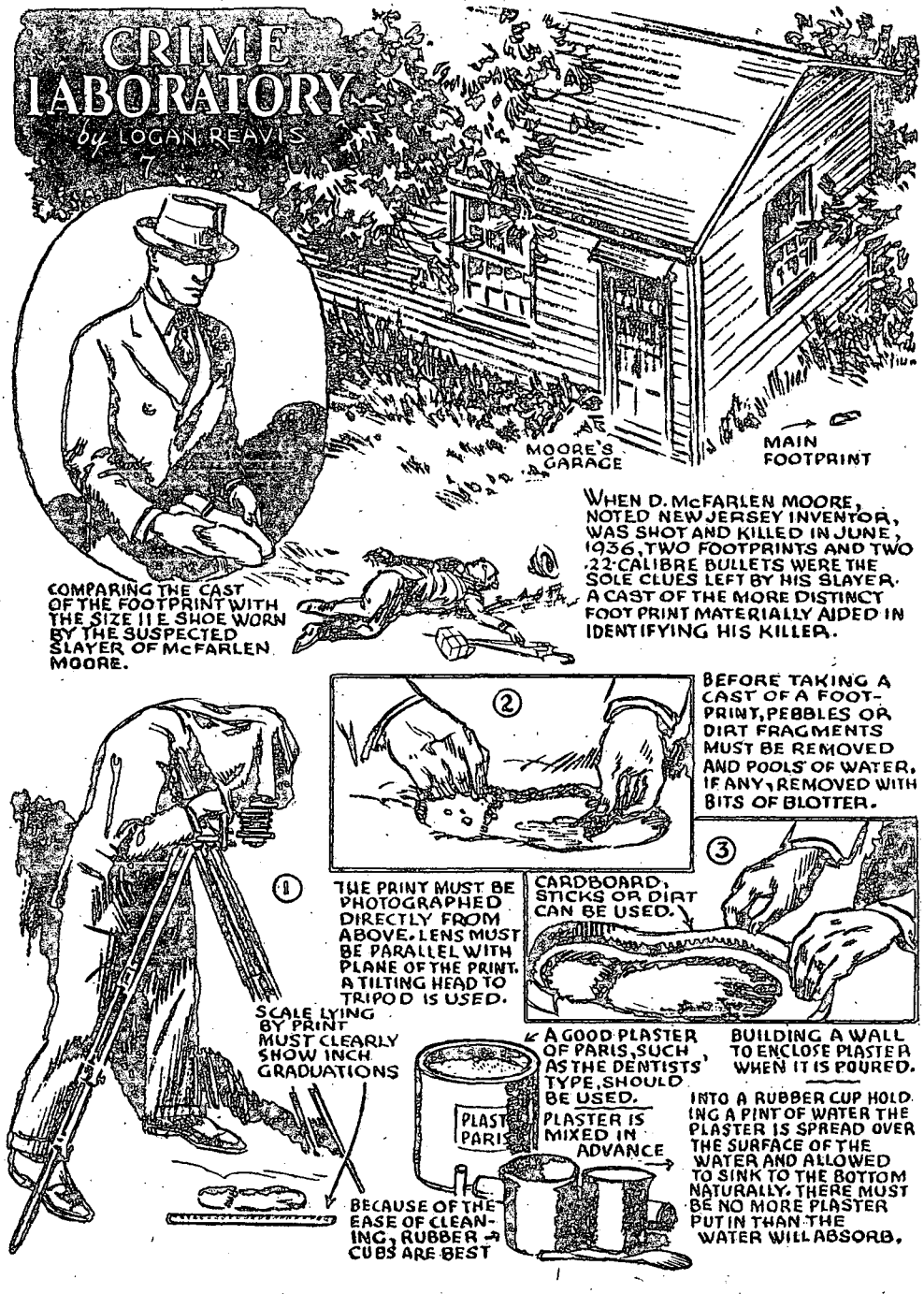
CRIME LABORATORY
by LOGAN REAVIS
MOORE'S GARAGE
MAIN FOOTPRINT
WHEN D. McFARLEN MOORE, NOTED NEW JERSEY INVENTOR, WAS SHOT AND KILLED IN JUNE, 1936, TWO FOOTPRINTS AND TWO .22 CALIBRE BULLETS WERE THE SOLE CLUES LEFT BY HIS SLAYER. A CAST OF THE MORE DISTINCT FOOT PRINT MATERIALLY AIDED IN IDENTIFYING HIS KILLER.
COMPARING THE CAST OF THE FOOTPRINT WITH THE SIZE 11 E SHOE WORN BY THE SUSPECTED SLAYER OF McFARLEN MOORE.
BEFORE TAKING A CAST OF A FOOT-PRINT, PEBBLES OR DIRT FRAGMENTS MUST BE REMOVED AND POOLS OF WATER, IF ANY, REMOVED WITH BITS OF BLOTTER.
2
3
1
THE PRINT MUST BE PHOTOGRAPHED DIRECTLY FROM ABOVE. LENS MUST BE PARALLEL WITH PLANE OF THE PRINT. A TILTING HEAD TO TRIPOD IS USED.
CARDBOARD, STICKS OR DIRT CAN BE USED.
SCALE LYING BY PRINT MUST CLEARLY SHOW INCH GRADUATIONS
A GOOD PLASTER OF PARIS, SUCH AS THE DENTISTS' TYPE, SHOULD BE USED.
PLASTER IS MIXED IN ADVANCE
BUILDING A WALL TO ENCLOSE PLASTER WHEN IT IS POURED.
INTO A RUBBER CUP HOLDING A PINT OF WATER THE PLASTER IS SPREAD OVER THE SURFACE OF THE WATER AND ALLOWED TO SINK TO THE BOTTOM NATURALLY. THERE MUST BE NO MORE PLASTER PUT IN THAN THE WATER WILL ABSORB.
BECAUSE OF THE EASE OF CLEANING, RUBBER CUBS ARE BEST

A man's footprints may be as distinctive as the man himself. Because of the impermanent character of impressions in such common materials as dirt, sand, or snow, rapid steps must be taken to preserve the print. Above is pictured in "close-up" the general method of making a plaster of Paris cast in soft or hard earth, dry marsh land or sand. Prints in snow or watery

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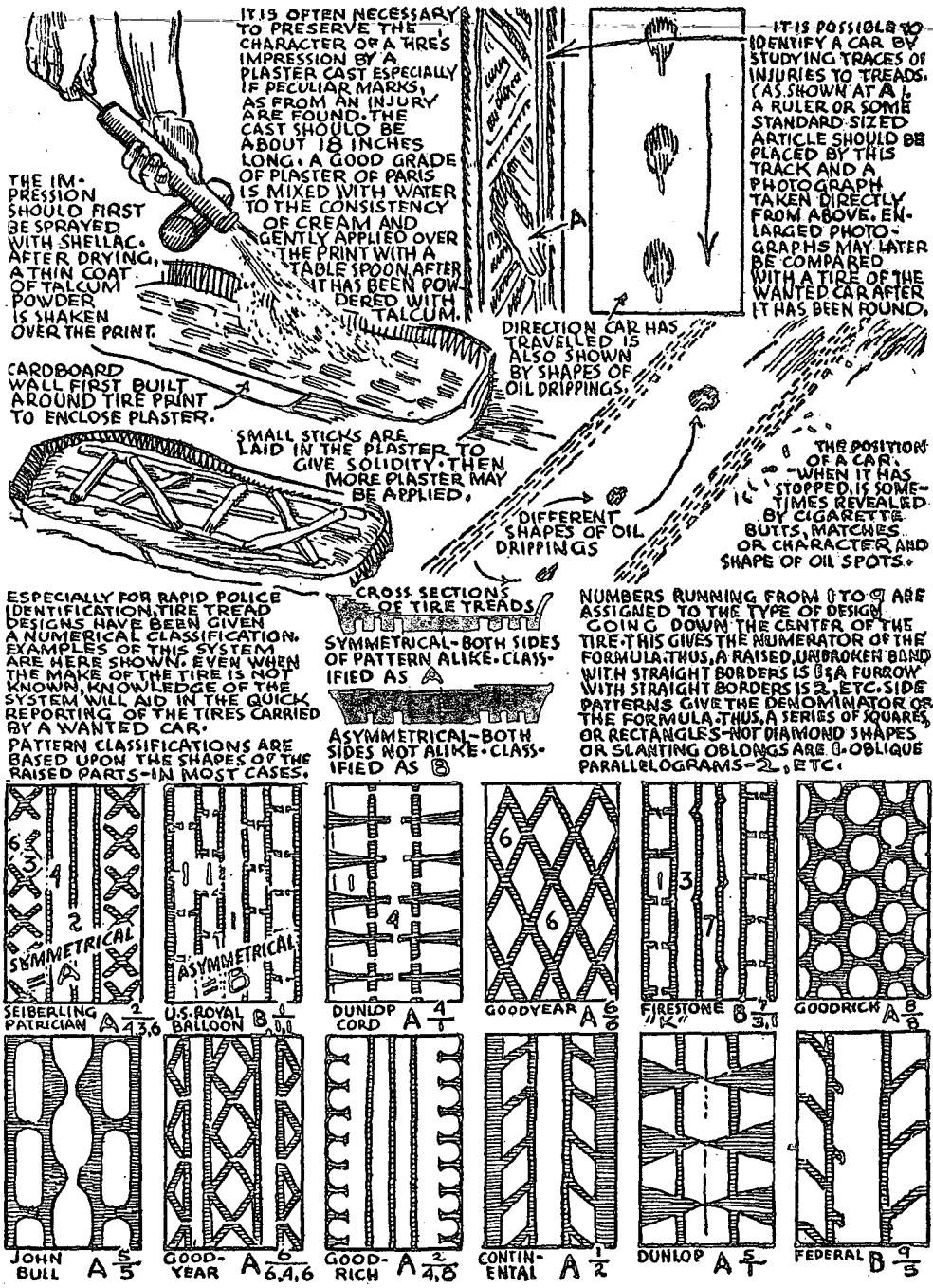
IT IS OFTEN NECESSARY TO PRESERVE THE CHARACTER OF A TIRE'S IMPRESSION BY A PLASTER CAST ESPECIALLY IF PECULIAR MARKS, AS FROM AN INJURY ARE FOUND. THE CAST SHOULD BE ABOUT 18 INCHES LONG. A GOOD GRADE OF PLASTER OF PARIS IS MIXED WITH WATER TO THE CONSISTENCY OF CREAM AND GENTLY APPLIED OVER THE PRINT WITH A TABLE SPOON AFTER IT HAS BEEN POWDERED WITH TALCUM.
THE IMPRESSION SHOULD FIRST BE SPRAYED WITH SHELLAC. AFTER DRYING, A THIN COAT OF TALCUM POWDER IS SHAKEN OVER THE PRINT.
CARDBOARD WALL FIRST BUILT AROUND TIRE PRINT TO ENCLOSE PLASTER.
SMALL STICKS ARE LAID IN THE PLASTER TO GIVE SOLIDITY. THEN MORE PLASTER MAY BE APPLIED.
IT IS POSSIBLE TO IDENTIFY A CAR BY STUDYING TRACES OF INJURIES TO TREADS. (AS SHOWN AT A.) A RULER OR SOME STANDARD SIZED ARTICLE SHOULD BE PLACED BY THIS TRACK AND A PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN DIRECTLY FROM ABOVE. ENLARGED PHOTOGRAPHS MAY LATER BE COMPARED WITH A TIRE OF THE WANTED CAR AFTER IT HAS BEEN FOUND.
A
DIRECTION CAR HAS TRAVELLED IS ALSO SHOWN BY SHAPES OF OIL DRIPPINGS.
THE POSITION OF A CAR, WHEN IT HAS STOPPED, IS SOMETIMES REVEALED BY CIGARETTE BUTTS, MATCHES OR CHARACTER AND SHAPE OF OIL SPOTS.
DIFFERENT SHAPES OF OIL DRIPPINGS
ESPECIALLY FOR RAPID POLICE IDENTIFICATION, TIRE TREAD DESIGNS HAVE BEEN GIVEN A NUMERICAL CLASSIFICATION. EXAMPLES OF THIS SYSTEM ARE HERE SHOWN. EVEN WHEN THE MAKE OF THE TIRE IS NOT KNOWN, KNOWLEDGE OF THE SYSTEM WILL AID IN THE QUICK REPORTING OF THE TIRES CARRIED BY A WANTED CAR.
PATTERN CLASSIFICATIONS ARE BASED UPON THE SHAPES OF THE RAISED PARTS—IN MOST CASES.
CROSS SECTIONS OF TIRE TREADS
SYMMETRICAL—BOTH SIDES OF PATTERN ALIKE. CLASSIFIED AS A
ASYMMETRICAL—BOTH SIDES NOT ALIKE. CLASSIFIED AS B
NUMBERS RUNNING FROM 1 TO 9 ARE ASSIGNED TO THE TYPE OF DESIGN GOING DOWN THE CENTER OF THE TIRE. THIS GIVES THE NUMERATOR OF THE FORMULA. THUS, A RAISED, UNBROKEN BAND WITH STRAIGHT BORDERS IS 1; A FURROW WITH STRAIGHT BORDERS IS 2, ETC. SIDE PATTERNS GIVE THE DENOMINATOR OR THE FORMULA. THUS, A SERIES OF SQUARES, OR RECTANGLES—NOT DIAMOND SHAPES OR SLANTING OBLONGS ARE 1. OBLIQUE PARALLELOGRAMS—2, ETC.
SYMMETRICAL A
ASYMMETRICAL B
SEIBERLING PATRICIAN A 2/3,6
U.S. ROYAL BALLOON B 1/0,1
DUNLOP CORD A 4/1
GOODYEAR A 6/6
FIRESTONE B 7/3,1
GOODRICH A 8/8
JOHN BULL A 5/5
GOODYEAR A 6/6,4,6
GOODRICH A 2/4,8
CONTINENTAL A 1/2
DUNLOP A 5/1
FEDERAL B 9/3

areas will be explained later. Some police departments have kits specially prepared for footprinting. Different kinds of sprayers are used. Care must be taken lest the shellac, in drying, clogs the holes. For rapid hardening, a small quantity of salt is mixed with the plaster. For slow hardening, sugar or dextrose is added. A CRIME LABORATORY feature dealing with ARSON will appear soon.

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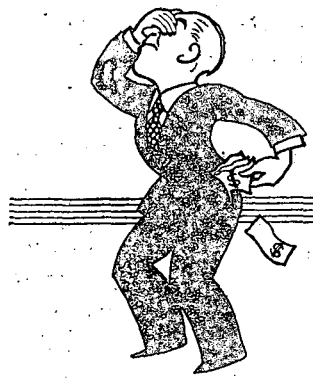

Picking Your Own Pocket

You Wouldn't Believe It!

By Frank Wrentmore

This is the fifty-third of a series of articles exposing business rackets that cost you billions of dollars every year! Mr. Wrentmore is an authority on swindles and frauds, well known to legal, financial and commercial associations.—The Editor.

THE admissions made by some advertisers when confronted with proofs adduced by the Federal Trade Commission are sometimes startling, sometimes funny, but always indicate that their previous advertisements were guileful. This article will review briefly stipulations signed by some of these advertisers with the Commission in order that you may not be deceived in the future by similar advertisements.

"Craft Service," of Rochester, N. Y., is engaged in the sale of materials, tools and other merchandise to Boy Scouts and others engaged in making craft work. They signed a stipulation to discontinue in advertising matter the use of the words "Navajo Silver" as descriptive of certain metal products they sell which are not composed of silver and are not made by Navajo Indians. To turn the tables, that's a good deed *for* the Boy Scouts.

Putinize Laboratories of San Francisco, Calif., agrees to cease representing that "Putinize," an eye lotion, overcomes or prevents any condition of the eyes, keeps them brilliant, restores their natural luster, that it is peferred by stars of the stage or screen and that it is a tonic or antiseptic containing no harmful ingredients. *It is admitted that repeated applications of certain ingredients such as those contained in "Putinize" may cause corneal ulcers.*

Medico Minerals Company of Ashland, Ore., who sell "Medico Mineral Water," signed a stipulation to cease representing that this product has value or possesses therapeutic properties especially beneficial in cases of the kind described in the advertising matter, and that it has any curative properties *other or greater than those usually obtained from the use of ordinary drinking water.*

According to the stipulation, it was claimed that "Medico Mineral Water" is highly beneficial in cases of indigestion, stomach and kidney disorders, rheumatism, and gland troubles, and is valuable in removing the cause of many human ailments. People have died from acute indigestion. Would you want to depend on a drink of water?

The Rite Product Co., Salt Lake City, Utah, agrees to quit making the representation that its product, "Stop Rite," will make old automobile brakes new or as good as new; that it is more

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effective than new brake lining, and will eliminate squeaks, squeals, brake adjustments, and prevent slipping, grabbing and drum scoring. They also agree to stop alleging that this product will make brakes serviceable for 20,000 miles or any other definite distance in excess of the mileage that has been demonstrated by reliable scientific tests.

I'd hate to depend on "Stop Rite" to save my life when I suddenly needed good brakes.

Aura Laboratories, New York City, are dealers in a device recommended for correcting protruding ears, known as "Aura Primset." They aver that the device consists of adhesive tabs and glue, and that while it may cause temporary correction, permanent relief cannot be had in all cases by the use of the device. They agree to stop advertising that "Aura Primset" is endorsed by physicians as the best method for correcting misshapen or protruding ears; that the device will give permanent relief; that normal setting of protruding ears is brought about immediately through the use of this device without resort to surgery, and other representations. If your ears won't behave, go to a doctor.

Pyroil Company, LaCrosse, Wisc, sells a graphited lubricant and agrees to ban the representation that this lubricant, called "Pyroil," contains a special solvent to remove carbon; will produce a perfectly smooth surface where deep scoring has occurred; will more than double the life of an automobile or increase its usefulness fifty to one hundred per cent, and other representations. This is one of many preparations which are to be added to gasoline for the purpose of removing carbon. It seems that the old reliable "valve and carbon job" is still the best method.

NU-TONE LABORATORIES, INC., Chicago, manufacturing radio, electrical, and household specialties, will cease advertising to the effect that its "Nu-Tone Aërial Eliminator," when used according to directions, will result in less static, in a perfect tone, perfect selectivitiy, or greater distance, or that its use will reduce static or noise, or eliminate all outside wires, in the sense that it will obviate the use of an outside aërial. In soliciting the sale of its "Line Noise Eliminator," the company agrees to desist from representations to the effect that it will eliminate line noise or reduce static or noise, when used on a radio set. That stipulation seems to eliminate the company's advertising altogether.

"Static Eliminators" are sometimes demonstrated and sold by street men who, apparently get marvelous results. They use a "gimmick," a device which is very expensive, fifty dollars or more, but which actually controls static. This is concealed in their apparatus and is responsible for the success of their phony demonstration. Recently, in New York, a young electrical engineer constructed a machine for producing electrical interference which the gimmick could not kill. He attended some of the street demonstrations during his lunch hour and nearly drove some of these street men crazy by producing his man-made static just when the pitch man was saying, "Now, gentlemen, I will show you how the 'Doo-dad' will eliminate static in your radio." He drove some of them off the streets.

Next Week—Racing Tipsters

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Solving Cipher Secrets

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first cryptogram each week is the easiest.

M. E. OHAVER
"Sunyam"

BLACKBIRD'S Cipher No. X-28, of Sept. 26, was based on the International Morse telegraph alphabet, the details of the system being explained in the message itself, as given below with the alphabet. Using the method as shown, the letter *a,* represented in Morse by a dot and a dash, would become "doda" in cipher, etc.; each cipher group thus signifying one letter. A quick solution of this cipher would depend upon the solver recognizing the final "d" as the word-separator, and the identification of the sequences for *the, with, this;* etc.

A	·−	H	····	O	−−−	V	···−
B	−···	I	··	P	·−−·	W	·−−
C	−·−·	J	·−−−	Q	−−·−	X	−··−
D	−··	K	−·−	R	·−·	Y	−·−−
E	·	L	·−··	S	···	Z	−−··
F	··−·	M	−−	T	−		
G	−−·	N	−·	U	··−		

Message: T H I S — *etc.*
Cipher: da dododo dodo dododod *etc.*

No. X-28. This cipher uses the International Morse alphabet, with "do" for "dot," "da" for "dash," and final "d" ending words.

Last week's Inner Circle cipher, D'Artagnan's No. 240, being pangrammatic, gave you a chance to find *q!* By inspection, bearing in mind the idiosyncrasies of *q,* symbols for this letter could be limited to C, I, J, and M. And a closer analysis would eliminate all of these except M, with the digraph MX thus following as *qu.*

Next, trying symbol V as *s,* due to its finality, *XGH (*U*- -) and VMXUB (*squ*- -) would yield *Ute* and *squaw* by context. And the rest would then readily follow. GRIUEUBOV (*t- -a-aw-s*), for example, would suggest *tomahawks,* checking with ERVV (- -*ss*), *hoss;* etc. The two words *Injun* and *hoss,* which may have puzzled you, are both legitimate dictionary spellings.

Opening this week's cryptograms, Roy C. Weidler, Jr., offers a division using a two-word key phrase, numbered *01 23456789.* Inspection will narrow down *zero* to two symbols. Next, J—J=S will give S, with U × U = S then limiting U to but two values; etc. Compare U, DOUD, DY, and OL in Clayton Johnson's limerick crypt, following with JUG, JUG'D, JUGGLE, and JUGGS. The phrase ZA GYU will help with UAXZAUUB, in David Gordon's contribution. GLUAGN-FZM will come next.

Note the affixes FY-, HSY-, -FYT, and -DFSY in Hopulikit's contribution, continuing with FYVLXRYHP; etc. Try for EPPKGMPKA, through its pattern, etc., in Blighty's message, continuing with HPLKEG and GZVHPKL. A solution of Jack IV's Inner Circle and the answers to all of this week's ciphers will be published next week. The asterisks in No. 243 precede capitalized words.

No. 241—Cryptic Division. By Roy C. Weidler, Jr.

```
DMU)YSJPOH(DUO
   YHJR
   ----
    JSUO
    JRDS
    ----
     YJDH
     YJJY
     ----
        JP
```


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No. 242—Puzzling Question. By Clayton Johnson.

U JUGGLE, ELTUEBUAKS JUGGS, YGL TYEGRGZ ELTUEBLF DY ORP ZEUGGS, "U JUGGLE JUG JUG UGSDORGZ DOUD OL JUG, AND U JUGGLE JUG'D JUG U JUG, JUG OL?"

No. 243—Lofty Structure. By David Gordon.

*ODUMOASBU *UZVVUD, *VBUARY UAXZAUUB, PKZDG GYU VOETKF *UZVVUD *GTLUB, ZA GYU *RYOEHF SU *EOBF, *HOBZF, *VBOARU, ZA GLUAGN-FZM ETAGYF.

No. 244—Third Degree. By Hopulikit.

LVFYT BYPBSYFHV, KSEFHP BRGP RBYPVFR OFHDFB DREG. BLXZPX HSYAPVVPZ. HRVP DXFPZ. OPXZFHD, "TLFEDU!" KPYREDU, PEPHDXSHLDFSY. NFZSN HSEEPHDV FYVLXRYHP BSYPU; BRXXFPV QLXSX.

No. 245—Tearful Tale. By Blighty.

XLVYRUA, EXXUYEPZL-UVDKHPKA HPLKEG DXZTKA HXRYYUHNXO EXZVY. VKEL TEPKLHUAK, GZVHPKL HKUBKA VEPUCK TZGEV. NRHFEVA EPPKGMPKA LKHSRK. AZRFXK DRVKLEX VKQP AEO.

No. 246—A Free Lunch. By Jack IV.

QKEMZAO RTMPKZBPA ELLHDEUO LZPXEBF XTKNEBDC. AZNOV RTZUS HOTXEHF LZP TLDK LDHUO. ZKGEVP, FDHGEKV EBDYV. ZGLA LZBYPH LEAVHS. AUHEG KPJV.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

235—Key:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
S	H	O	P	L	I	F	T	E	R

236—"Labor is discovered to be the grand conqueror, enriching and building up nations more surely than the proudest battles." —Channing.

237—Seven brother motorists went for a spin! One hit a telephone pole, etc.; one crashed into a stone wall, etc.; one tried to beat a train at a crossing, etc.; etc.

238—Operatives strolling third-floor corridor knock once, twice, thrice upon paneled wall, which silently opens, revealing secret passageway, elevator, inner sanctum entrance.

239—Corpulent cavalry corporal craves cognac. Consumes cognac copiously, chastises complacent colonel. Colonel charges culprit. Corporal cashiered? Certainly!

240—Locoed broncho kicks big buck. Injun scalps hoss. Squaw scalps Injun. Crazy Ute Tomahawks Jewish ox driver. Frontier days!

Send us your answers, cryptofans, to one or more of this week's puzzles! You will be credited in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for October. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

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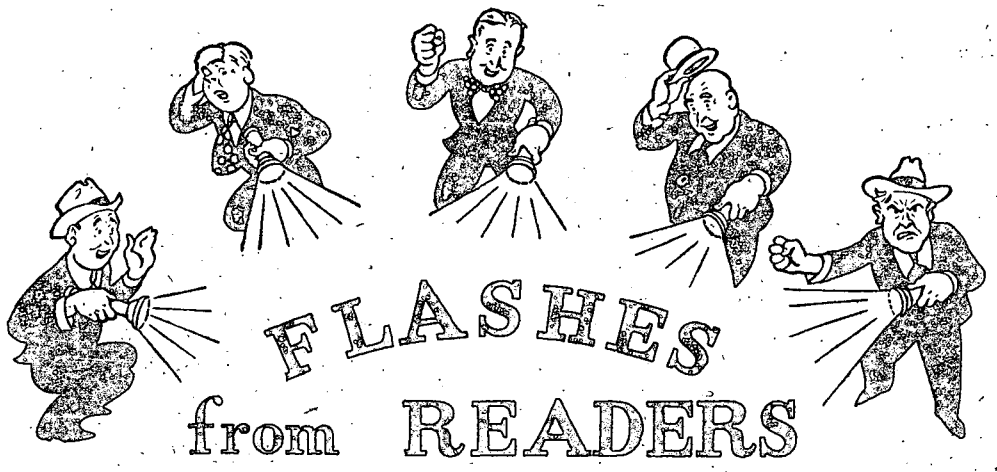

IT is gratifying to learn from readers, now and then, that the feature departments in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY are proving helpful in many ways. A number of readers have communicated with us in connection with FRANK WRENTMORE'S articles on "PICKING YOUR OWN POCKET" and "THEY'RE SWINDLING YOU!" telling us how information in those articles saved them money and grief. Other readers have achieved permanent security by passing their Civil Service examinations, at least partially through "G-2's" assistance. Naturally, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY is proud of this record. If, besides providing top-notch fiction entertainment, we can aid our readers otherwise to live richer and fuller lives, we are only too glad to do so. We will be extremely interested in hearing from more readers who feel that they have benefited from the magazine in other ways.

A former Sammie writes us from France.

DEAR SIR:

Last night I finished reading Judson P. Philips' "Convention Murders." I enjoyed it a lot. I think it is the best story of 1936 so far and put it in the form of a motion. Who seconds it?

DFW travels around a lot here in France. I mail my copy to a fellow in Aignoz (Ain) who mails it back to a lad in Yerres (Seine et Oise), who in turn gives it to another former A.E.F.'s, etc., etc. While your mag is bought only once, in this instance, it is read by at least four former Sammies living in France.

Been a constant reader of DFW for four years. (ARGOSY for many more.) I prefer it by many lengths to any other detective mag—especially those plentifully-photographed-so-called-true-detective-mags.

My favorite authors are Philips, MacIsaac (dead heat) and bunched behind Thomas, Maxwell, Davis, Woolrich, Wrentmore, Flynn and Linklater.

Vive DFW!

Sincerely,
JOSEPH A. WALSH,
Asnieres (Seine).

Thank you kindly, Mr. Solotoroff!

DEAR EDITOR:

I'm not in the same class with all the gentlemen who have been reading DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY since the days when it was FLYNN'S. As a matter of fact, I am probably one of your newest steady readers, because I discovered the magazine only this spring.

But I want to thank you for publishing such a splendid magazine. DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY has given me more sheer fiction enjoyment than any two other magazines I have ever read.

In fact, it has been my sole reading the three months I have spent developing this little farm of mine, and much as I am interested in guaranteeing solid security for my little family, I do need some relaxation, and I am very grateful that I can get it all in your magazine.

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I thought that the September 5th issue was an especially fine one. I know that it is more than you expect of any single reader, but I really enjoyed every blessed story in that copy.

And now that I am also a steady DETECTIVE FICTION fan, I can see why the older readers are so jealously loyal. It's the best detective magazine money can buy: and it's worth twice the price. I know because, if necessary, I would pay it!

Yours very truly,
GEORGE SOLOTOROFF,
New Haven, Conn.

We were just talking about this.

DEAR SIR:

Your articles under the heading "PICKING YOUR OWN POCKET" are good and helpful reading—wish they were not so short.

You have real good stories—I'm enjoying those about the secret agent *Devrite* by Tom Curry, and Fred MacIsaac's stories are always good, too.

Your magazine is a mighty good lot of reading for a dime.

Yours truly,
WALTER CASSIDY,
New York City.

Watch for *Fluffy McGoff*. He'll be back soon.

DEAR EDITOR:

I just want to write in now, while I think about it, and compliment you on the first story in the August 29th issue of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY. T. T. Flynn has long been one of my most favorite authors, and this story by him: "He Asked for It," is one of the best he has ever done.

I could stop right there, because that's what I started out to say in the first place, but I want you to know that, in my opinion, the rest of the magazine is just as fine in quality as the Flynn story.

I am getting a great deal of enjoyment from the stories about Katie Blayne, the girl reporter for the *Sun* who is always a step ahead of her male competitors in the police reporting room.

I also liked Tom Curry's story about *Devrite*, "The Queen's Taste."

This letter is getting out of hand now, but I have one more little idea I'd like to express before signing off.

I sincerely hope that you will go on with your policy of having a number of characters who reappear from time to time in the magazine. I also hope that some of the old-timers will be coming back in the pages. I like *Paul C. Pitt*, but I also liked *Fluffy McGoff*.

PAUL WESLEY,
Scranton, Pa.

TWO PUFFS from that soggy pipe full of firewater tobacco and another redskin bit the dust. We tell travelers as well as stay-at-homes that the true pipe of peace should be regularly cleaned, and packed with nothing but inoffensive Sir Walter Raleigh Smoking Tobacco. It's a secret blend of definitely milder Kentucky Burley leaf. Burns slow, pacifies the tenderest tongue and spreads a most delightful and winning fragrance. We're so blamed proud of Sir Walter Raleigh we wrap it in heavy gold foil for extra freshness. Ever treated yourself to a tin? Only 15¢.

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COMING NEXT WEEK!

SEVEN FACES

An Exciting, Baffling New Novel

By Max Brand

SEVEN faces, symbols of old-time plunder and murder, haunted that eccentric millionaire, *John Cobb*. Seven faces, threatening revenge for bygone wrongs, forced *Cobb* to flee for his life. But that could not save him, even accompanied in flight by *Patrick O'Rourke* and *Angus Campbell*, oil-and-water teammates on New York's homicide squad. Nothing could save him, and those bickering, veteran lawmen are hard-pressed as never before, when they try to solve the greatest mystery Max Brand has even written!

EX-COP

A Complete Short Novel

By Franklin H. Martin

EVEN his widowed mother and orphaned sweetheart did not know why *Danny Lannon*, square cop, was crazy enough to maul brother officers, start a riot in a courtroom, and slug the Commissioner in an insane effort to get behind grim prison walls.

ME—KILLER!

A Startling Long Novelette

By Frederick C. Painton

THIS is a curious human document—the story of a scientist who lived by the outlaw creed, worshiped at the altar of egoistic cruelty, loved with mad carelessness and cursed the petty men who frustrated him.

Plus a fine selection of short stories, true stories, and the regular DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY features by STOOKIE ALLEN, "G-2," FRANK WRENTMORE and M. E. OHAVER.

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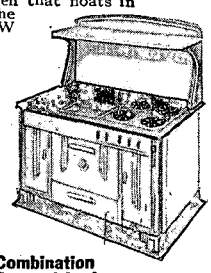
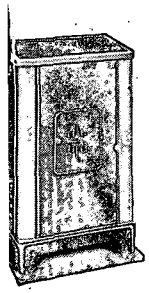
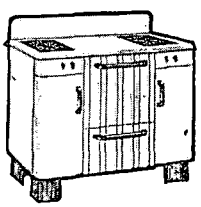
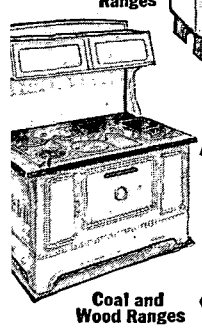


Combination Gas and Coal Ranges

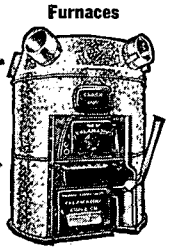




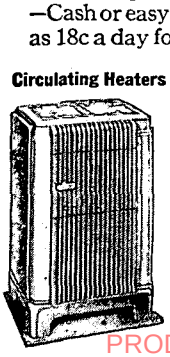
Gas Ranges



Coal and Wood Ranges



Furnaces



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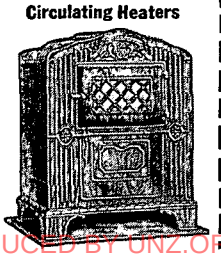

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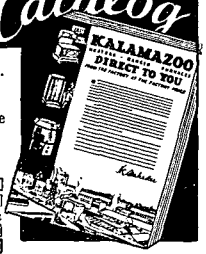

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